

THE ARGOSY.

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COURT NETHERLEIGH.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD, AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

CHAPTER XIX.

GIVEN INTO CUSTODY.

THEY sat at the well-spread dessert-table in Grosvenor Square, those two gentlemen, the sole partners of almost the wealthiest house in London; keen, honourable, first-rate men of business, yet presenting somewhat of a contrast in themselves. He at the table's head, Francis Grubb, was fine and stately, wearing in his countenance, in its expression of form and feature the impress of true nobility—nature's nobility, not that of the peerage—and young yet. James Howard, who might be called the chief partner, so far as work and constant, regular attendance in the City went, though he did not receive anything like an equal share of the profits, was an elderly man, short and stout, his face hard and stern, his hair iron gray, and his black coat rusty. Mr. Howard had walked up from his house in Russell Square this evening to confer with his chief upon some matter of business. It a little surprised Mr. Grubb: for, with them, business discussions were always confined to their legitimate province—the City.

The Lady Adela, Mr. Grubb's rebellious but very charming wife, quitted the room speedily, leaving them to the discussion that Mr. Howard had intimated he wished for. But Mr. Howard did not show himself in any haste to enter upon it. He sat on, surveying abstractedly the glittering table before him, with its rich cut glass, its silver, its china, and its sweet flowers, talking—abstractedly also—of the passing topics of the day, more particularly of a political meeting which had taken place that afternoon. Mr. Grubb was a Conservative; he a Liberal; or, as it was more often styled in those days, Tory and Whig.

"What news is it that you have brought me, Howard?" began Mr. Grubb at last, breaking a pause of silence.

"Aye—my news," returned Mr. Howard, as though recalled to the

thought. "Did you draw a cheque on Saturday morning, before leaving home, in favour of self, and get it cashed at Glyn's?"

Mr. Grubb threw his thoughts back on Saturday morning. The reminiscence was unpleasant. The scene which had taken place with his wife was painful to him, disgraceful to her. He had drawn no cheque.

"No," he answered, thinking a vast deal more of that scene than of Mr. Howard's question.

"A cheque for five hundred pounds, in favour of self?" continued Mr. Howard, slowly sipping his port wine.

"I don't draw at Glyn's in favour of self. You know that, Howard, as well as I do." Messrs. Glyn and Co. were the bankers of the firm; Coutts and Co. the private bankers of Mr. Grubb.

"Just so. Therefore, upon the fact coming to our notice this afternoon that such a cheque had been drawn and paid, I stepped over to Glyn's and made inquiries."

"How did it come to your notice?"

"This way. John Strasfield had all the cheques, drawn last week, sent to him for the usual purpose of verification—he has his own ways of doing his business, you know. In looking over them he was rather struck with this cheque, because it was drawn to self. Self, too; not selves. After regarding it for a minute or two, another thought struck him—that the signature was not quite like yours. So he brought the cheque to me. I don't think you signed it."

Mr. Grubb rose and closed the door, which he had left ajar after opening it for Lady Adela, the evening being very warm. John Strasfield was their confidential cashier in Leadenhall Street.

"If it is your signature, your hand must have been nervous when you wrote it," continued Mr. Howard, "rendering the letters less decided than usual."

That Mr. Grubb had been nervous on Saturday morning he was quite conscious of; though not, he believed, to the extent of making his hand unsteady. But he had not drawn any cheque.

"It was drawn in favour of self, you say. Was it signed with my private signature, Francis C. C. Grubb?"

"No; with the firm's signature, Grubb and Howard. Glyn's people suspected nothing wrong, and cashed it."

"Who presented the cheque?"

"Charles Cleveland. And he received the money."

"Charles Cleveland!" repeated Mr. Grubb in surprise, his whole attention fully aroused now. "There is some mystery about this."

"So it seemed to me," answered the elder man. "Cleveland stayed out of town to-day—by your leave I think you said."

"Yes, he asked me on Saturday to let him have to-day; he was going down to Netherleigh: his elder brother, Captain Cleveland, meant to run down there to say good-bye. Charles will be back to-night, I suppose. But—I don't understand about this cheque."

"I'm sure I don't," said Mr. Howard. "Except that Charles Cleveland got it cashed."

"Where did Charles Cleveland procure the cheque?" asked Mr. Grubb, his head all in a puzzle. "Who drew the cheque? Where's the money? Howard, there must be some mistake in your information."

"It was Saturday morning that you left the cheque book at home, and sent Cleveland for it, if you remember," said Mr. Howard, quietly.

"Ah, to be sure it was; I do remember. A long while he was gone."

"You asked him what made him so long I chanced to be in your room at the moment: and he said he had been doing a little errand for himself. Well, during that period of his absence, that is, somewhere between ten and half-past eleven, the cheque was presented by him at Glyn's, and cashed. What does it all say?" concluded Mr. Howard.

Francis Grubb looked a little bewildered. No clear idea upon the point was suggesting itself to his mind.

"I thought young Cleveland was given to improvident habits," resumed Mr. Howard, "but I never suspected he was one to help himself to money in this way; to ——"

"He *cannot* have done it," interrupted Mr. Grubb, earnestly decisive. "It is quite impossible. Charles Cleveland is foolish and silly enough, just as boys will be, for he is no better than a boy; but he is honest and honourable."

"Are you aware that he spends a great deal of money?"

"I think he does. I said so to him last week. It was that pouring wet day, Wednesday, I think, and I told him he might go down to Leadenhall Street with me in the carriage if he liked. I took the opportunity of speaking to him about his expenditure, telling him it was a great deal easier to get into debt than to get out of it."

"Which he had found out for himself, I expect," grumbled Mr. Howard. "How did he receive it?"

"As ingenuously as you could wish. Blushed like a school-girl. He confessed that he had been spending too much money lately, and laid it chiefly to the score of his brother's being in London. Captain Cleveland's comrades are rather an expensive set; the allowance that he gets from his uncle is good; and Charles has been led into expense through mixing with them. The very moment his brother left, he said, he should draw in and spend next to nothing."

Mr. Howard smiled grimly. "One evening, strolling out after my dinner, I chanced to meet the young gentleman, came full upon him as he was turning out of a florist's, a big bouquet of white flowers in his hand. 'You must have given a guinea for that, young sir,' I said to him, and he did not deny it; just leaped into a cab and was off. I don't suppose those flowers were for Captain Cleveland or for any of his comrades."

Mr. Grubb knitted his brow. He had not the slightest doubt they were for his wife. What a silly fellow that Charley was!

"He may get into debt; I feel sure he is in debt; but he would not commit forgery—or help himself to money that was not his. I tell you, Howard, the thing is impossible."

"He presented the cheque and received the money," dryly remarked Mr. Howard. "What has he done with it?"

"But no one, not even a madman, would go to work in this barefaced way," contended his more generous-minded partner, "conscious that it must bring immediate detection and punishment down upon his head."

"Detection, yes; punishment does not necessarily follow. That, he may be already safe from."

"How do you mean?"

"Suppose you inquire what clothes he took with him," suggested Mr. Howard. "My impression is that he's off. Gone! The Netherleigh tale may have been only a blind."

Mr. Grubb rose and rang the bell, staggered nearly out of his senses; and, until it was answered, not another word was spoken. Each gentleman was busy with his own thoughts.

"Richard," began the master to his servant, "when Mr. Charles Cleveland left for the country yesterday morning, did he take much luggage with him?"

"Don't think he took any, sir; unless it was his small port-manteau."

"Did you happen to hear him say whether he intended to make a long stay?"

"I did not hear him say anything, sir. But Mr. Cleveland is back."

"Back!" echoed Mr. Howard, surprised into the interference.

"He came back half an hour ago, sir, and went out again as soon as he had dressed. The cab waited for him. He is gone to dine at the Army and Navy."

"Then no elucidation can now take place until morning," observed Mr. Grubb, as the servant withdrew. "When he has gone out lately on these dining bouts he does not get home till late, sometimes not at all. But rely upon it, Howard, this matter will be cleared up satisfactorily, so far as he is concerned. Though what the mystery attending the cheque can be, I am unable to imagine."

"I am sure I am, looking at it from your point of view," returned the elder man. "See here: you come down to Leadenhall Street on Saturday morning, and find you have left the cheque book of the firm at home here. You send Charles Cleveland for it, telling him to take a cab and to make haste. After being away three or four times as long as he need be, he comes back with the cheque book, having found it, he says, where you had told him it probably would be found—in the room where you breakfasted. He does not account

for his delay, except by the excuse that he was doing an errand for himself, and begs pardon for it. Well and good. To-day we find that a cheque has been abstracted from that same cheque book, filled in for five hundred pounds, and was cashed by Cleveland himself, all during this same interval on Saturday morning, when he declines to account for his time. What do you make of it?"

Put thus plainly before him, Mr. Grubb did not know what to make of it, and his faith in Charles Cleveland began to waver. The most prejudiced mind cannot altogether fight against palpable facts. Mr. Howard opened his pocket book, took the cheque in question from it, and laid it, open, before his senior partner.

"This is not Cleveland's writing," remarked Mr. Grubb.

"Of course not. It is an imitation of yours. That is not his ordinary handwriting. He has done it pretty cleverly. Glyn's were deceived. Not but that I consider Glyn's clerk was incautious not to see the difference between 'self' and 'selves.' He says he did not notice the word at all: but he ought to have noticed it."

"It is a singular affair altogether," observed Mr. Grubb, in a musing tone. "To begin with, my bringing home the cheque book at all was singular. You were not in the City on Friday, you know, Howard, and ——"

"I couldn't come when I'd got the cholic," grunted out Mr. Howard.

"My dear, good, old friend, do you suppose I thought you could?" answered Mr. Grubb, checking a laugh. "I was going to say that, as you were absent, I signed the cheques on Friday, and the book lay on my desk. It happened that my private cheque book also lay there. When I left, I put the firm's cheque book in my pocket by mistake and locked up the other; meaning, of course, to do just the contrary. But for this carelessness on my part, Charles Cleveland would not have had the opportunity of—good heavens! What a blow this will be for his father! We must hush it up."

"Hush it up!" cried out the other and sterner man of business. "Not if I know it. That's just like you, Francis Grubb! Your uncle Francis, my many years' friend, used to accuse you, you know, of having a soft place in your heart."

"I am thinking of that good man, with his many cares, the Rector of Netherleigh."

"And I am thinking of his son's bold, barefaced iniquity. Be you very sure of one thing, sir—Glyn's won't hush it up; they are the wrong people to do it. Neither must you. A pretty example it would be! No, thank you, no more wine; I have had my quantity."

"Well, well, we shall see, Howard. I cannot understand it yet."

When Mr. Grubb got upstairs that night, he found his wife gone out, leaving no message for him. She never did leave any. Davvy thought her lady had gone to the opera. Mr. Grubb followed, and found her there. The box was full, and there was little room for him. He said nothing to her of what had occurred: he meant to keep it

from her if he could, to save her pain ; and from all others, for the Honourable and Reverend Mr. Cleveland's sake.

Mr. Grubb sat down to breakfast the next morning alone. Lady Adela had not risen ; Charles Cleveland did not make his appearance.

"Does Mr. Charles Cleveland know I am at breakfast, Hilson ?" he inquired of the butler, who was in attendance.

"Mr. Charles Cleveland left word—I beg your pardon, sir, I forgot to mention it—that he has gone out to breakfast with his brother, Captain Cleveland, who sails to-day for India. He went out between six and seven."

"He came home last night, then ?"

"Yes, sir ; about one o'clock."

Mr. Grubb glanced over the letters waiting in a stack by his plate, some for himself, some for Lady Adela. Amidst the former was one from his sister, written on Saturday. Her mother (who had been ill for some time) was much worse, she said, and she begged her brother to come down, if possible, on Monday morning.

It chanced that Mr. Grubb had made one or two appointments for people to see him that morning at his house ; so that it was eleven o'clock when he reached Leadenhall Street.

"Well, where is he ?" began Mr. Howard, without ceremony of greeting.

"Where's who ?" asked Mr. Grubb.

"Charles Cleveland."

"What—is he not come yet ?" returned Mr. Grubb, whose thoughts had been elsewhere.

"Not yet. I don't think he means to."

To be late, or in any other way inattentive to his duties, had not been one of Charley's sins. Therefore his absence was the more remarkable. Mr. Grubb started for Blackheath, almost endorsing Mr. Howard's opinion that the delinquent had embarked with his brother for India, or for some other place not speedily accessible to officers of justice.

Twelve o'clock was striking by St. Paul's when Charley bustled in, hot, and out of breath. He was told that Mr. Howard wanted him.

"I beg your pardon, sir, for being so late," he panted, addressing himself to that gentleman, when he reached his private room, "especially after my holiday of yesterday. I went early this morning to Woolwich, and on board ship with my brother, intending to be back by business hours ; but, what with one delay and another, I was unable to get up till now."

"It is not business-like at all, sir," growled the old merchant.

"But—stay a bit, Mr. Cleveland ; we have a few questions to put to you."

Charles glanced round. In his hurry he had seen no one but Mr. Howard. His eye now fell on a little man, who sat in a corner. Charley knew him to be connected with Glyn's house ; and he knew

that the time was at hand when he would have need of all his presence of mind and his energies. It chanced that this gentleman had just come in to know if anything had come to light about the mysterious cheque.

"You presented a cheque for five hundred pounds at Glyn's on Saturday morning, and received the amount in notes," began Mr. Howard. "From whom did you get that cheque?"

No reply.

"Purporting to be drawn and signed by Mr. Grubb. I ask from whom you received it?"

"I decline to answer," Charles said at length, speaking with hesitation, in spite of his preparation for firmness.

"Do you deny having presented the cheque?"

"No. I do not deny that."

"Do you deny having received the money for it?" interposed the gentleman from the bank.

"Nor that, either. I acknowledge to have received five hundred pounds. It would be waste of folly to deny it," continued Charles to him, in a sort of calm desperation, "since your clerk could prove the contrary."

"But did you know what you were laying yourself open to?" cried Mr. Howard, evidently in a maze of astonishment, for he took these admissions of Charles's to be tantamount to an absolute acknowledgment of his guilt.

"I know now, sir."

"Will you refund the money?" asked Mr. Howard, dropping his voice; for that stern man of business had been going over the affair half the night as he lay in bed, and concluded to give the reckless young fellow a chance. Truth to say, Mr. Howard's bark was always worse than his bite. "Out of consideration for your family, connected, as it is, with that of the head of our firm, we are willing to be lenient; and if you will confess, and refund ——"

"I cannot refund, and I must decline to answer any more questions," interrupted Charles, fast relapsing into agitation.

Mr. Howard stared at him. "Do you understand, young man, what it is that you would bring upon your head? In point of fact, we are laying ourselves open to, I hardly know what penalty of law, in making you this offer; but Mr. Grubb is so anxious it should be hushed up for your father's sake—whom everybody respects. If you decline it; if you set me at defiance—as, it seems to me, you wish to do—I shall have no resource but to give you into custody."

"I beg to state that the matter is not in our hands yet," spoke up the banker to Charles. "If it were, we could not make you any such offer. Though, of course, we can fully understand and appreciate the motives that actuate your principals, with whom the affair at present wholly rests. It would be a terrible blow on the Cleveland family; and everyone must wish to save them from it."

"I—I am very sorry," gasped Charles, feeling all this to his heart's core. "Unfortunately——"

"The matter is not known beyond ourselves," interposed Mr. Howard again, indicating himself and the banker; "and it need not be. But it is solely out of consideration for your family, you understand, that we offer to hush it up. Will you explain?"

"I cannot. Unfortunately, I cannot, sir. It is not in my power."

"Then I give you in charge at once."

"I can't help it," said poor Charles, passing his hand over his hot brow.

Mr. Howard, very hard, very uncompromising, when deliberately provoked, was as good as his word. And Charles Cleveland was given into custody for forgery.

CHAPTER XX.

"THAT IT MAY BE WELL WITH US IN AFTER LIFE."

It was all over and done with long before Mr. Grubb got up from Blackheath in the afternoon. He felt terribly vexed. Vexed for Charles himself, terribly vexed for Charles's family, vexed on his own score. To his refined and sensitive mind, it almost seemed that he had violated the sacred laws of hospitality, for Charles had been staying, as a guest, in his house.

The first thing he did was to hasten to the prison to which Charles had been conveyed, preparatory to his examination on the morrow. The young man was in his cell, sitting on the edge of his narrow bed, and looking very down-hearted. The entrance of Mr. Grubb seemed to bring to him a sudden flash of hope. He started up.

"Oh, sir," he exclaimed, in high excitement, "will you not look over this one error? My father will replace the money—I am sure he will, rather than suffer this public disgrace to fall upon the family. Do not force the shame upon him. And—and there's my brother—just embarked—what will he do? Oh, Mr. Grubb, if you will but have mercy!"

"Charles—don't excite yourself like this—I am come here to offer you the mercy," spoke Mr. Grubb; and his considerate manner, his voice of music, were just like a healing balm. "I am come straight from Mr. Howard to renew the offer he made you. It is not yet too late: we will make things right to-morrow: there will be no prosecutor, you understand. Will you give me, myself only, the particulars you denied to Mr. Howard?"

Just for one eager moment the wish flashed across Charles's mind that he might tell the truth to this good man. Was he not Adela's husband, and would he not excuse her in his love? The next, he saw how futile was the wish. Could *he* be the one to betray her?—and to her husband? Shame upon him for the thought! He had

vowed to her to hold her harmless, and he would do so for her sake.

"To me it appears that there's a mystery in the affair which I cannot fathom," continued Mr. Grubb. "Your conduct in it is perfectly incomprehensible. It may be better for you to confide in me, Charles."

"I cannot, sir. I wish I could."

"What if I tell you that, in spite of appearances, I do not myself believe you guilty?"

A bright, eager flush, a glance of *understanding* illumined for a moment Charley's face. It seemed to say that just, honourable natures know and trust in each other's innocence, no matter what may be the surrounding signs of guilt. But the transient expression faded away to sadness, and Mr. Grubb was in doubt whether it had really been there.

"I can explain nothing," said the prisoner. "I can only thank you, sir, for this proof of confidence, and implore your clemency on the ground of compassion alone."

"Charles Cleveland, this won't do. You are either guilty or innocent. Which is it?"

"Guilty, of course," said Charley in his desperation. For, if he said "innocent," the next rejoinder would be "Then who is guilty?" And he could not answer that, or any other close question.

"Did you do this vile thing of your own accord; or were you induced to do it by another?" pursued Mr. Grubb, his head running upon Charley's debts and Charley's fast companions.

"I—I—pray do not ask me more, sir! It is a wretched business, and I must suffer for it."

"Am I to understand that you wholly refuse to confide in me?—refuse to be helped? I would be your true friend."

"I *must* refuse," gasped poor Charley. "I have nothing to tell. I did present the cheque at Glyn's, and I drew the money. And—and I hope you will forgive me, sir, for I am very miserable."

"Is all the money spent?"

"I—I have not got as much as a shilling of it. If I had, I'd give it back. It's too late."

Nothing better than this could Mr. Grubb wring from the unfortunate prisoner. And he left him *believing he was guilty*. He left in rather an angry mood, too, for he thought Charles was bearing out Mr. Howard's report and showing himself defiantly, ungratefully obstinate. That he had been in some most pressing and perhaps dangerous difficulty on the Saturday morning, and had used these desperate means to extricate himself, must be, he concluded, the fact. A great deal of his compassion for Charles melted away; the young man seemed hardened.

On the following morning the case was taken before the magistrates. It was heard in private. The influential house, Grubb and Howard, could have commanded a greater concession than that.

One magistrate only sat, a very pliable one, Sir Turtle Kite. The case was but slightly gone into, the prosecutors asking for a week's remand: they wished to trace out more particulars, also wished to trace the notes. At the end of that time the prisoner would be brought up again; and meanwhile he was consigned to that awful place, Newgate.

In spite of all efforts to keep it secret, the affair partially got wind. Not, however, in its true details. All kinds of exaggerated rumours and surmises ran the rounds of the clubs. But for the recent sojourn of Captain Cleveland in London, Charley might have remained quite an obscure individual, as regarded the fashionable world. But he had been a great deal with his brother, and was known and liked everywhere.

What a commotion arose! Charles Cleveland in Newgate on a charge of robbery, or forgery, or what not! Charley Cleveland the popular—Charley Cleveland, the grandson of an earl gathered to his fathers, and nephew of one who stood in his shoes—Charley Cleveland, the out-and-out good fellow, who was wont to scare the blue devils away from everybody—Charley Cleveland, who, in defiance of his improvidence and his shallow pocket, was known to be of the nicest honour amongst the honourable!

"The thing's preposterous altogether," stuttered John Cust, who had a natural stammer. "If Charley had drawn the money he would have had the money, and I know that on Saturday afternoon he had not a rap, for he borrowed three sovs. of me to take him down to Brighton ——"

"Netherleigh, Cust."

"Netherleigh, then. What put Brighton in my head, I wonder? Fancy he went to try and get some money out of his governor."

"Which he did," added Lord Deerhum. "A five-pound note."

"And paid me back the three on the Monday night, when he came to his brother's spread at the Rag and Famish," continued John Cust. "Gammon! Charley has not been making free with anybody's name."

"But he acknowledges to having drawn the money," squeaked Booby Charteries. "A thousand pounds, they say."

"You may take that in yourself, Booby. We don't."

"But the Lord Mayor ——"

"Lord Mayor be hanged! If he swears till he's black in the face that Charley did it, I know he didn't. There."

"Twasn't the Lord Mayor. Some other one of those City big-wigs."

"Anyway, he is in Newgate. It's said, too, that it is Grubb and Howard who have sent him there."

"Did he rob their cash-box?"

"Do they accuse him of it, you mean, Booby. As if Charley would do such a thing!"

"Let us go down to Newgate, and have a smoke with him," cried

Charteries, who had so small a share of brains and so very small a voice as to have acquired the nickname Booby. "It may cheer the fellow up, under the present alarming state of things."

"As if they'd admit us inside Newgate, or a smoke either!" retorted John Cust. "There's only one thing more difficult than getting into Newgate, and that is, if you are in, getting out again. Don't forget that, Booby."

"Couldn't some of us go and punch a few heads down there, beginning with old Howard's," again proposed Booby. "I don't say Grubb's."

"Grubb has had nothing to do with bringing the charge; you may rely upon that," said Lord Deerhum. "Grubb's a gentleman. You shut up, Booby."

Ah! it was all very well for these idle, foolish young men to express their sympathy with the prisoner in their idle, foolish way: but, what of the distress of those connected with him?

Thomas Cleveland, Honourable and Reverend, heard from his wife, who was still staying at her mother's, that something was amiss, and came up from Netherleigh to find his son incarcerated in Newgate and accused of forgery. Down he went to the prison at once, and got admission. Charley looked, in that short period, greatly changed. His dress was neglected, his hair unkempt, and his face haggard. Charley, the fastidious!

Mr. Cleveland was overcome beyond control, and sobbed aloud. He was a venerable-looking man of nearly sixty years now, and had always been a fond father. Charley was little less affected.

"Why did you not kill me when you last came down, Charles?" he moaned out in his perplexity and anguish. "Better have put me out of this world of pain than bring this misery upon me. Oh, my boy! my boy! you were your mother's favourite: how can you so have disgraced her memory?"

"I would I had been put out of the world, rather than be the curse to you I have proved," writhed Charley, wishing Newgate would yawn asunder and engulf him. "Oh, don't—father, don't!" he implored, as Mr. Cleveland's sobs echoed through the cell. "If it will be any consolation to you to know it, I will avow to you that I am not guilty," he added, the sight of his father's affliction momentarily outweighing his precaution. "By all your care of me, by your present grief, by the memory of my dead mother, I swear to you that I am not guilty."

Mr. Cleveland looked up, and his heart leaped within him. He knew Charles was speaking truth. It was impossible to mistake that earnest tone.

"Thank God!" he murmured. "But what, then, is this I hear, about your declining to make a defence?" he presently asked. "I am told you have as good as acknowledged your guilt." Charles hung his head, and relapsed into prudence again.

"My boy, answer me. How came you to accept—as it were—the charge, if you are innocent?"

"For your private comfort I have said this, dear father, but it must remain between us as if it had not been spoken. The world must still, and always, believe me guilty."

"But why?—why? What mystery is this?"

"Do not ask me, sir. Believe that you have not a son more free from the guilt of this crime than I am. Nevertheless, I must pay the penalty, for I cannot defend myself."

Mr. Cleveland thought this about the most extraordinary thing he had ever met with. Nothing more could he get out of Charles; nevertheless, he did believe in his innocence. From Newgate he went on to Leadenhall Street, to see the gentlemen who had brought this charge, and found only one of them in: Mr. Grubb.

"You are not more pained at the affair than I am," said the latter, closing the door of his private room, "and certainly not more astonished."

"Oh, Mr. Grubb," cried the clergyman, "could you not have hushed this wretched disgrace up, for all our sakes? or at least made more inquiries before taking these extreme steps? You who have shown so much true friendship for me!"

"I would have hushed it up. I wished to hush it up altogether. I would have paid the money over and over again out of my own pocket, rather than it should have become known, even to Mr. Howard. It was he, however, who brought the tidings of it to me."

"And Mr. Howard would not?"

"Mr. Howard would. At first he seemed inclined to be hard. Thorough business men look upon these things with a stern eye. However, he knew my wishes, and came to. He was the first to speak to Charles. He asked him to acknowledge the truth to him, and he would forgive it. Charles refused; set him, so to say, at defiance; told him, I believe, to do his best and his worst; and Mr. Howard gave him into custody."

"It is very strange."

"When I found what had happened—I had been out of town that day—I went at once to Charles. I told him that I could not believe him guilty, and I entreated him to tell me the circumstances of the case, which looked to me then, and look still, unaccountably mysterious ——"

"And he would not?" interrupted Mr. Cleveland, recalling how Charles had just met him.

"He would not tell me a word: told me he would not. I said I could even then set matters straight, and would get his release on the morrow, and nothing about it should ever transpire. He thanked me, but said he had nothing to tell; was, in fact, guilty. I could only think he must be guilty, and left him with that impression on my mind."

"It is altogether very strange," repeated Mr. Cleveland in a musing tone, as he sat stroking his face and thinking. "Will you state the particulars to me, as far as you are cognisant of them. I asked Charles to do so, but he would not."

"It occurred on Saturday morning," began Mr. Grubb. "When I reached the City, I found I had not got with me the cheque book of the firm, which I had taken away by mistake the previous evening, and I sent Charles home to look for it. He was a long while gone, but brought it when he came. During the period of his absence one of the cheques was abstracted, filled up for five hundred pounds, and ——"

"Filled up by whom?"

"The writing was an imitation of mine. Charles presented it at Glyn's, and got it cashed. All this he acknowledged to; but he refuses to say what he did with the money."

"Mr. Grubb," cried the agitated father, "appearances are against him—were never, I perceive, more strongly against anyone; but, before heaven, I believe him to be innocent."

Mr. Grubb made no reply.

"He has assured me of his innocence by the memory of his dead mother; and innocent I am sure he must be. He stated in the same breath that he should avow it to no one else, but submit to the penalty of the crime just as though he had committed it. As to what he did with the money—he could not have used it for himself. On that very Saturday afternoon he had to borrow money to bring him down to Netherleigh the next morning. John Cust lent it him."

"It is very singular," acknowledged Mr Grubb.

"Charles confessed as much to me at Netherleigh—that he had borrowed the money from Cust to get down with; three pounds, I think it was. I gave him a five-pound note, and a lecture with it. He promised to be more cautious for the future, and said that after Harry left he should not have occasion to spend much—which is true. But now, what I would like to know is this—if he drew that five hundred pounds, where is it? How came it that the next hour, so to say, he had none in his pocket?"

Mr. Grubb certainly could not answer.

"Has he been made the instrument of another?" returned Mr. Cleveland. "Was he imposed upon by anyone?—sent to cash a cheque that he himself thought was a genuine and proper cheque?"

"That is scarcely likely. Were it the case, what objection could he have to declare it? My opinion is—I am sorry to have to give it—that Charles had got into some desperate money trouble, and used desperate remedies to extricate himself."

"What more desperate trouble could he be in than this?"

"True. But he may have hoped we should be lenient. Even now," added Mr. Grubb, his voice trembling with the concern he felt, "we might be able to save him if he would but disclose the truth. Mr.

Howard absolutely refuses to quash the matter unless he does : and I think he is right."

"But Charles won't disclose it; he won't," bewailed the clergyman, taking the other's hand in token of his gratitude. "Look here, my dear friend," he added, after a pause of thought, "can Charles be holding his tongue to screen somebody?"

"To screen somebody? How?"

"That he did this thing willingly, with his eyes open, I never will believe. It is not in a Cleveland's nature to commit a crime. Moreover, I repeat to you that he has just assured me of his innocence by the memory of his dead mother. No, no; whatever may be the facts, Charles was not wilfully guilty. I could stake my life upon it. In cashing that cheque he must have been made the innocent tool of another, whom he won't betray out of some chivalrous feeling of honour."

"But no one had possession of the cheque book but Charles," reasoned Mr. Grubb. "He found it in the breakfast-room where I had left it. My servants are honest; they would not touch it. Moreover, it was Charles, himself, who presented the cheque for payment, and got the money."

Mr. Cleveland rubbed his gray hair back with a look of perplexity; hair that was getting scanty now. Look at the case in what way he would, it presented contradictions and difficulties that seemed to be insuperable.

"You are staying at Lord Acorn's, I suppose," remarked Mr. Grubb, when he rose to leave.

"Until Saturday. I can't run away from London and leave my boy in Newgate. Heaven be with you! I know you'll do for him what you can."

The whole of the after-part of this day certain words spoken by the unhappy father haunted Francis Grubb. *In cashing that cheque he must have been made the innocent tool of another, whom he won't betray out of some chivalrous feeling of honour.* An idea had been presented to him which he might never have taken up of himself; a painful idea; and, do what he would, he could not drive it away. It intruded itself into his business; it followed him home to dinner; and it worried him while he ate it. He had not found Lady Adela at home. She was dining out somewhere. Certainly Mr. Grubb's domestic life was not a very sociable one. After dinner he went to his club.

It was eleven o'clock before he got home; later than he had meant to be, but he did not expect his wife to be there yet. The butler, a trustworthy, semi-confidential servant, who had entered the service of the uncle, Francis Grubb, when his present master was a boy, and who had become greatly attached to him, came to the drawing-room to see if anything was wanted.

"Is Lady Adela in?" asked his master.

"No, sir. Her ladyship came in not long ago for a minute or two, and went out again."

"Stay a minute, Hilson," cried Mr. Grubb, as the man was turning away. "Shut the door. Carry your memory back to last Saturday. Did you chance to see Mr. Charles Cleveland come in that morning?"

"Yes, sir: I was at the front door, talking to one of Lady Acorn's servants, who had brought a parcel for Lady Adela. Mr. Cleveland jumped out of the cab he was in, and ran past me all in a hurry, saying he had come to look for something the master had left behind him."

"Did he go at once to the room where I breakfasted?"

"No, sir. My lady chanced to be descending the stairs at the moment; Mr. Cleveland went towards her, asking where Mr. Grubb had breakfasted. In a minute or two, it could not have been much more, he came running out again, leaped into the cab, and went away in it at a great rate. That was the first time, sir."

Mr. Grubb lifted his eyes. "The first time! What do you mean?"

"Mr. Charles Cleveland came back again, sir. Not directly; half an hour or three-quarters later it may have been, perhaps more, I had not taken particular note of the time. I was in the hall then, watching John clean the lamp—he has done it slovenly of late. The front door was rung and knocked at as if it was going to be knocked down. I opened it, and Mr. Charles Cleveland rushed past me up to the drawing-room: I never hardly saw anybody in a greater hurry than he seemed to be. He came down again directly, my lady with him, and they went into the breakfast-room. He then ran out to the cab, and drove away at a fiercer rate than before."

"Was it the same cab?"

"Oh yes, sir. Taking both times together he was not in the house three minutes."

"Not long enough to ——" Mr. Grubb checked himself, and remained silent.

"Not long enough to have drawn a false cheque, sir, when the handwriting has to be studied—as we have been saying below," put in the butler, following too closely his master's thoughts.

Mr. Grubb felt disagreeably startled. "Hilson! what are you saying? *Who* has talked of this below?"

"Only Davvy, sir. She got to know of it this morning through ——well, sir, I believe through a letter that my lady gave her to read."

"But how was that?" questioned Mr. Grubb, in a displeased tone.

"It was through a mistake of my lady's, sir," replied Hilson, dropping his voice. "She had meant to give Davvy a note from Madame Damereau, about the trimming of a dress; instead of that, she gave her one from Lady Grace. Davvy has been uneasy ever since, and she spoke in confidence to me."

"Why uneasy?"

"Well, sir, Davvy thinks it an unpleasant thing to have happened, especially for us upper servants. The cheque must have been torn out and filled in by somebody."

"Nonsense," interposed Mr. Grubb. "Take care you do not speak of this, Hilson; and caution Davvy."

"No fear of me, sir; you know that. I told Davvy she must have misunderstood Lady Grae's note, and that she must hold her tongue; and I am sure she will. She was very sorry to have read it. She asked my lady's instructions as to the dress, and my lady tossed the note to her, saying she would find them there. Davvy read on to the very end, expecting to come to them. That's how it was, sir."

Mr. Grubb remained on alone, deep in painful thought, his head bent on his hand. His vague suspicions were strengthening, strengthening terribly.

And what of Lady Adela? This could not have been a good time for her—as the children say. Made aware that morning by Grace's letter that Charles was taken into custody, she was seized with terror: and perhaps it was not so much carelessness as utter bewilderment that caused the stupid error of handing the wrong letter to Davvy. Adela saw her father in the course of the day. Too anxious to remain passive, she went out to hear what she could at Lord Acorn's, putting to him a cautious word of inquiry. Lord Acorn made light of the whole business—he did not yet know the particulars. Charley would soon be released, he carelessly said; Grubb would take care of that. As to a little fright, or a short incarceration, it would do Master Charley good—he had been going the pace of late. And this opinion of her father's so completely reassured Lady Adela, that her fears of consequences to Charley subsided; she returned home, took up her visiting, and was her own saucy self again.

She came in early to-night, before twelve o'clock, looking cross. Her husband rose from his chair, and smoothed his troubled face.

"Where have you been, Adela?"

"To Lady Sanely's:" and the tone of defiance audible in Lady Adela's answer arose from the consciousness that he had forbidden her to go there. The dissatisfied face she brought back with her, and the early hour of her return, seemed to say that she had not met with much pleasure there this evening. Perhaps she had staked, and lost, all the money she had taken; or, perhaps, play was not going on that night.

She threw herself into a chair, eating a biscuit she had caught up from a plate on the table, and let her mantle fall from her shoulders. How very pretty she looked! Her dress was white lace, trimmed about with small blush roses; her cheeks wore a lovely flush; a pearl necklace, of priceless value, lay on her fair neck, bracelets to match encircled her slender arms: one of the many magnificent gifts of her fond husband.

"Don't shut the door," cried Adela, tartly, for he had crossed the room to do it. "I'm sure it's hot enough."

"Ah, but I want to say a few words to you," he replied, as he closed it. And the Lady Adela, divining by a subtle instinct which penetrates to us all at odd moments, one cannot tell how or wherefore, that the subject of his "few words" was to be Charley's trouble, and not her transgression as to Lady Sanely's, armed herself for reprisal. Adela never felt sure afterwards that she had not been wicked enough to put up a hasty prayer for aid. Aid to be firm in disguising the truth: aid to blind him as to her share in the past Saturday's exploit and to strengthen the accusation against Charley. Rising from her seat, she crossed to the nearest window and threw it open, as if needing a breath of the soft midnight air.

"This is a sad business about Charles Cleveland, Adela. I find you know of it."

"Yes," she answered, fanning away a moth that was floating in, attracted by the light. "I hope you are satisfied with your work. You had a paltry spite against him, and you have cast him into Newgate to gratify it."

"Adela, you know better."

"It is enough to ruin his prospects for life. It would ruin some people's—they who are without influential connections. Of course Charley will soon be on his legs again, and laugh at his paltry enemies."

Mr. Grubb put his hand, almost caressingly, on his wife's arm, and caused her to turn her face to him. "Will you tell me what you know of this, my dear?"

"Tell you what I know of it!—How should I know anything of it?" she retorted, flirting her costly fan. "Poor Charley may have meant to borrow the money for a day or two—I don't accuse him; I only say it may have been so—and then to have replaced it: but you and that old kangaroo of a partner of yours have prevented him doing it. To gratify your own revenge you seized upon him before he had time to act, and threw him into that place of crime where men are hung from—Newgate. You did it to bring disgrace upon my family, through my sister Mary."

He did not reply to this: he was accustomed to her unjust accusations.

"Adela," he said, dropping his voice to a whisper, "were you wholly ignorant of this business? *Who drew the cheque?*"

She turned round with a start, defiance in her eyes.

"Adela, my wife," he whispered, gently laying both hands upon her shoulders in his earnestness, "if you had anything to do with this business, if Charles Cleveland was not the guilty party, acknowledge it now. Confide in me for once. I will avert consequences from him and suspicion from you. The secret shall be buried in my breast, and I will never revert to it."

Oh, what possessed her that she did not respond to this loving

appeal in time? Was it pure fright that prevented her? Shame?—Shame to have to confess to her guilt? Any way, she steeled her heart against it. Her lovely features had grown white, and her eyes fell before his. Presently she raised them, flashing with indignation, her tone, her words, as haughty as you please.

"Mr. Grubb, how dare you offer me this insult?"

"Do not meet me in this way, Adela. I am asking you a solemn question; remember that there is One above Who will hear and register your answer. Were you the principal in this transaction, and was Cleveland but your agent? Do not fear to trust me—*your husband*: you shall have my free forgiveness now, beforehand, my shelter, my protection. Only tell me the truth, as you wish it to be well with us both in after life."

Again she cowered before his gaze, and again recovered herself. Could it be that her better angel was prompting her to the truthful path?

"What can possibly have induced you to put such a question to me?"

"It is an idea that has forced itself upon my mind. Without some such explanation the affair is to me an utter mystery. If Charles Cleveland —"

"And don't you think you ought to be ashamed of yourself!" she interrupted. "I rob a bank! I steal a cheque! Has it come to this—that you suspect *me*?"

"Forgive me, Adela, if I am wrong. Be it how it may, you should meet me differently. Oh, my wife, let there be perfect confidence between us at this moment, on this subject. Tell me the truth, as before Heaven!"

"Am I in the habit of telling you untruths? I thought the truths I tell you were generally a little too plain to be pleasant," she added in her bravado. "None but a mean-spirited man could so suspect his wife."

"This is all you have to say to me, Adela—your definite answer?"

"Definite enough," she retorted, with a nervous sob, between a laugh and a cry; for, what with fear and discomfort, she was becoming slightly hysterical.

"I am bound to believe you, Adela," he said, the tears in her eyes disarming his latent doubts. "I do believe you. But —"

"And now that you have had your say, listen to me," she interrupted, choking down all better feeling and speaking with contemptuous anger. "Never speak on the subject to me again if you would keep up the semblance of peace between us. My spirit has been dangerously aroused against you, Mr. Grubb; not only now, for this injustice to me, but for your barbarous treatment of poor Charles Cleveland."

Once more, he knew not why or wherefore, something like a doubt returned to Mr. Grubb's mind. He held her before him.

"It has been the truth, Adela?—as I hope, and pray, and trust! I ask it once again—that it may be well with us in after life."

"Would I trouble myself to tell a falsehood about it to *you*? Do you think I have no feeling—that I should bear such distrust? And if you would recompense me for this mauvais quart d'heure, you will release that poor fellow to-morrow—for his father's sake."

She flung her husband's arm away and quitted the room, leaving him to *his* feelings. Few can imagine them—torn, outraged, thrown back upon his generous heart. But she had certainly managed to dispel his doubts of herself. No guilty woman, as he believed, could have faced it out as she did.

"It must have been Cleveland's own act and deed, and no other person's," he mentally concluded. "What madness could have come over the lad?"

CHAPTER XXI.

TRACING THE NOTES.

ONE of the most able counsellors of the day, Mr. Serjeant Mowham, chanced to be intimately acquainted with the Rector of Netherleigh; and the unhappy father despatched him to Newgate, in a friendly, not in a legal capacity, to see what he could do with or for the prisoner.

He could not do much. The old saying, "Tell your whole case to your lawyer and your doctor," is essential advice, but Charles Cleveland would tell nothing, neither truth nor falsehood. In vain Serjeant Mowham protested, with tears in his eyes (a stock of which, so the Bar affirmed, he kept in readiness), that he was working in the dark, working for pure friendship's sake, and that without some clue or hint to go upon, no defence that had a chance of success could be made, even though his advocate before the judge told all the *un*-truths that ever advocate's tongue gave utterance to. The prisoner was immovable, and Serjeant Mowham in despair.

How matters really would have ended, and whether Mr. Howard would have allowed it to come to trial, cannot be said, had not fortune been kinder to Charles than he was to himself.

One morning, when the days before the prisoner's second examination were growing few, the Earl of Acorn had a slice of luck. He had backed a certain horse at a provincial race meeting, and the horse won. Amongst other moneys that changed hands was a fifty-pound note. An hour after the Earl received it he made his way into his drawing-room in haste, where sat his daughters, Grace and Mary Cleveland; the latter with her infant on her lap.

"Mary," cried the Earl, "what were the numbers of the notes paid over to Charles Cleveland at Glyn's? I partly remember them, but not quite."

"My husband has them," answered Lady Mary. "But the thing

has given me by far too much worry, papa, for me to retain the numbers in my head. I am not sure I ever heard them."

"I have them," interrupted Grace. "I copied them the other day. There was no knowing, I thought, but it might prove useful."

"Quite right, Gracie girl," said the Earl. "Let's see them. '3,0,2,5,5,'" continued Lord Acorn, reading one of the numbers which Lady Grace laid before him. "I thought so. One of these notes has just been paid to me, Mary, by young Waterware."

"Where did he get it?" eagerly inquired Grace.

"I did not ask him. It was only since I left him that I noticed the number. I'll get it out of him by-and-by."

"At once, at once, sir," urged Mary. "Oh, papa, do go to him. I feel *sure* Charles is not guilty."

"No impatience, Mary. Where the deuce am I to pick up Waterware at this time of day? I might as well look for a needle in a bottle of hay. To-night I shall know where to find him."

Chance, however, favoured the Earl. In strolling up St. James's Street, in the afternoon, he met Lord Waterware.

"I say, Waterware," he began, linking his arm in that of the younger peer, "where did you get that fifty-pound note you gave me this morning?"

"Where did I get it! Let's see. Oh, from Nile. He was owing me a hundred, and he paid me yesterday. That fifty, two twenties, and a ten. Why? It's not forged, I suppose," cried the young nobleman, with a yawn.

"Not exactly. Wish I had a handful of them. Good day. I'm going on to Nile's."

Colonel Nile, though addicted to play a little at cards for what he called amusement, and sometimes did it for tolerably high stakes, was a very different man from those other men mentioned in this history—Colonel Houghton and Mr. Piggott, who had led Robert Dalrymple to his ruin. They were professed gamblers, and had disappeared from good society long ago. Colonel Nile was a popular member of it, liked and respected.

Lord Acorn found him at home, walking about in a flowery dressing-gown. He was a middle-aged man, and a bachelor, and well off.

"The fifty-pound note I paid over to Waterware," repeated Colonel Nile, cautiously, somewhat surprised at the question, and wondering whether random young Waterware had got into any scrape. "Why do you want to know where I got it?"

"Because it is one of the notes that Charley Cleveland is in trouble for; the first of them that has been traced. You must give me the information, Nile, or I shall apply for it publicly."

"Oh, I have no objection in the world," cried the Colonel, determined to afford all that was in his power, and so wash *his* hands of any unpleasantness that might turn up. "I received it at Lady Sanely's loo-table, from—egad! from your own daughter, Lady Adela."

"From Lady Adela!" echoed the surprised listener.

"From Lady Adela, and nobody else," repeated Colonel Nile. "She paid another fifty to the old Dowager Beck the same evening."

Lord Acorn stared. "But surely they don't play as high as that there!"

"Don't they, though! and higher, too. To tell you the truth, Acorn, it's getting a little too high for prudent people. I, for one, mean to draw in. Old Mother Sanely lives but for cards, and she'd stake her head if it were loose. She has the deuce's own luck, though."

With a mental word, sharp and short, given to his daughter Adela for allowing herself to be mixed up in company and amusement such as this, Lord Acorn brought his attention back to the present moment. "Adela gave another fifty-pound note to Lady Beck, you say, the same evening! Do you happen to know its number?"

"Not I," retorted the Colonel, who was not altogether pleased at the questions. "I don't make it my business to pry into notes that do not concern me."

"How long is it ago?"

"I hardly know. Nearly a week, I suppose. It is four or five days since I was first confined to the house with this incipient gout. I think it was the night before that—Saturday night."

Lord Acorn proceeded straight to Lady Beck's; and, with much trouble and persuasion, she was induced to exhibit the note spoken of by Colonel Nile, which was still in her possession, for, like the Colonel, she had been ill for some days, so had had no opportunity of playing it away. The old dowager was verging on her dotage, and could not, at first, be convinced that the Earl was not going to take law proceedings against her for winning money of his daughter. He soothed her, copied the number by stealth, went home, and compared it with Lady Grace's pocket-book. *It was another of the notes!*

"What do you think of it, Grace?" cried the Earl, in perplexity. "Can Cleveland have been owing money to Adela."

"I should imagine not," replied Lady Grace.

"To think she should be such a little fool as to frequent a place where they play like that!"

"But, papa, you knew of it."

"I did not know old Sanely went in for those ruinous stakes. Five pounds, or so, in a night to risk—I thought no worse than that."

Grace understood now. She had deemed her father indifferent. He was then looking at it from one point of view; she from another.

"It wears a singular appearance," mused the Earl. "To tell you the truth, Grace, I don't like the fact of these notes being traced to Adela. It looks—after the rumour of the absurd flirtation they carried on—almost as if she and Cleveland had gone snacks in the spoil. What now, Gracie? Are you going to fly?"

For Lady Grace Chenevix had bounded from her chair in sudden

agitation, her arms lifted as if to ward off some dread fear. "Sir! father! the thing has become clear to me. That I should not have suspected it before!—knowing what I did know."

"Child," he cried, gazing at her in amazement, "what is the matter with you?"

"Adela did this. I see it all. She drew the cheque. Charles Cleveland was only her instrument; and, in his infatuated attachment, he has taken the guilt on himself, to shield her. Well may he have asserted his innocence to his father! Well may his conduct have appeared to us all so incomprehensible!"

"Why, Grace, you are mad!" gasped the Earl. "Accuse your sister of—of—forgery! Do you reflect on the meaning of your words?"

"Father, do not look so sternly at me. I feel sure I am right. I assure you it is as if scales had fallen from my eyes, for I see it perfectly clearly. Adela wanted money for play: she had been drawn in, far deeper than anyone suspected, sir, at Lady Sanely's gaming-table. It was Mr. Grubb's intention to refuse her further funds: no doubt he did refuse them: and ——"

"How do you know it was his intention?"

"Oh, papa, I do know it; never mind how now. I say that Mr. Grubb must have refused her; and she, when this cheque book fell into her hands ——"

"Don't continue, Grace," sharply interposed Lord Acorn; "you make my blood run cold. You must prove what you assert, or retract it. If—it—*is* proved"—the Earl drew a long breath—"Cleveland must be extricated. What a thundering fool the fellow must be!"

"Let me have time to think," said Grace, putting her hand to her head. "Extricated of course he must be, for I know it is true, but—if possible—without exposing Adela."

With the last words, Grace sank back in her chair and burst into a storm of sobs. Lord Acorn was little less moved. They spoke together further, and agreed not to tell Mary Cleveland, in spite of her state of impatience, that Lord Acorn had traced the numbers of the two notes.

Lady Grace decided to confide all to Mr. Grubb. It could not be kept from him long; and she wanted to bespeak his clemency for Adela. So in the evening she proceeded to his house, tolerably sure that her sister would be out somewhere or other. But she found Mr. Grubb also out: at his club, Hilson thought. Grace dismissed her carriage, went up to the drawing-room, and wrote a word to Mr. Grubb, asking him to come home. The thought crossed her, that perhaps it was not quite the thing to do, but Lady Grace Chenevix was not the one to stand upon formal ceremony.

He returned at once, full of bustle and looking rather anxious. "Anything the matter, Grace? Anything amiss with Adela? She's not ill?"

"She is at the Opera, I fancy; very well, no doubt." And then she sat down and imparted her suspicions—just an allusion to them—that her poor sister was the culprit.

"Grace," he whispered, "I don't mind telling you that the same fear haunted me, and I spoke to her. She indignantly denied it."

"Two of the notes have been traced," murmured Grace.

"Traced!"

"Paid away by Adela, at Lady Sanely's."

There was a dead silence. Lady Grace Chenevix did not raise her eyelids, for she felt keenly the pain of avowal. An ominous shade of despair overspread his face.

"Grace, Grace," he broke forth in anguish, "what is it you are saying?"

"One of them, for fifty pounds, came into my father's hands to-day, and he has traced it back to Adela," continued Grace, striving to keep down the signs of her pain. "Another of them she paid the same evening to the Dowager Beck. Papa knows of this; he found it out to-day. What inference can we draw but that Adela —— You know what I would say."

"Could she descend to this?" he groaned. "To be a party with Charles Cleveland ——"

"Charles was no party to it," interrupted Grace warmly; "he must have been her instrument, nothing more. Rely upon that. Whatever may be his follies, he is the soul of honour. And it must be from some chivalrous sense of honour, of noblesse oblige, you understand, that he is continuing to shield her now the matter has come out. What is to be done? Charles Cleveland must not be tried as a felon."

"Heaven forbid!—if he be indeed innocent. But, Grace," thoughtfully added Mr. Grubb, "I cannot but think you are mistaken. Were Adela guilty she would have acknowledged it to me, when I told her, in all tenderness, that I would forgive, shield, and protect her."

Lady Grace answered by a despairing gesture. "She would not confess to you for very shame, I fear. Dear Mr. Grubb, *what* is to be done? We have to save Adela's good name as well as his. You must see Charles, and get the truth from him."

"I would rather get it from Adela."

"If you can. I doubt it. Having denied it once, she will never confess now."

Lady Grace had reason. Mr. Grubb spoke to his wife the following morning. He said that two of the notes had been traced to her possession; and that, for her own sake, she had better explain, while grace was yet held out to her. But he spoke very coolly, without the smallest sign of endearment or tenderness; nay, there was a suspicion of contempt in his tone, and that put Adela's spirit up.

What answered she? Was she quite blind, quite foolish?

She persisted in her denial, called him by a scornful name, haughtily ordered him to be silent, and finally marched out of his presence, declaring she would not re-enter it until he could finally drop all allusion to the subject.

With a half curse on his lips—he, so temperate and sweet-tempered a man!—Mr. Grubb went straight to Newgate, and obtained an interview with the prisoner. It came to nothing satisfactory; Charles was harder in his obstinacy than ever. From thence Mr. Grubb drove back to the West End, to Chenevix House. Some morning visitors were there, and Lady Mary Cleveland was exhibiting her baby to them. Mr. Grubb admired with the rest, and then made a sign to Grace. She followed him into the next room.

"I don't see what is to be done," he began. "Adela will not hear a word, will not admit anything, and I can make nothing of Charles Cleveland. Upon my mentioning Adela—of course, only in hints; I could not accuse my wife outright to him—he interrupted me with a request that I would not introduce Lady Adela's name into so painful a matter; that he had brought the disgrace upon himself, and was prepared to pay for it. I think he may have lent the two notes to Adela. It would be but one hundred pounds out of the five. I cannot believe, if my wife were guilty, that Cleveland would take the penalty upon himself. Transportation for life, or whatever the sentence incurred may be, is no light matter, Grace."

Grace shuddered. "Do not let him incur the risk of it."

"I would rather cut off my right hand than punish a man unjustly, were he my greatest enemy. But unless I can get at the truth of this matter, and find proof that your view of it is correct, I shall have no plea, to my partner, to Glyn, or to my own conscience, for hushing it up; and the law must take its course."

"Alas! alas!" murmured Lady Grace.

"You seem to overlook my feelings in this affair, Grace," he whispered, a deep hue dyeing his cheeks. "That she may have had something to do with it her paying away the notes proves: and to find the wife of your bosom thus in league with another — You don't know what it is, Grace."

"I can imagine it," she answered, the tears standing in her eyes as she rose to answer his adieu. "Believe me, you have, and always have had, my deepest and truest sympathy; but Adela is my sister; what more can I say?"

Grace sat on, alone. The murmur of voices came to her from the adjacent room, but she heeded it not. She leaned her head upon her hand, and debated with herself. It was imperative that the real facts of the case should be brought to light; for if Charles Cleveland were permitted to stand his trial, perhaps to suffer the penalty of transportation, and it came out, later, that he was innocent, and her sister the guilty party, what a fearful position would be that of Adela!

Could Charley not be brought to confess through stratagem,

mentally debated Grace. Suppose he were led to believe that Adela, to save him, had declared the truth, *then* he might speak. It was surely a good idea. Grace weighed it, in all its bearings, and thought the end would justify the means. But to whom entrust so delicate a mission? Not to Mr. Cleveland, he would betray it all to Charles at the first sentence; not to Mr. Grubb, his high sense of honour would never let him intimate that Adela had confessed what she had not; not to Lady Mary, for her only idea of Newgate was that it was a place overflowing with infectious fevers, which she should inevitably bring home to baby. Lord Acorn? Somehow Grace could not ask him. Who next? Who else was there? *Herself?* Yes, and Grace felt that none were more fitted for the task than she was—she who had the subject so much at heart. And she resolved to go.

But she could not go alone to Newgate. Her mother ought to be with her. Now the matter, relative to the tracing of the notes to Adela, had been kept from Lady Acorn. Grace disclosed it to her in the emergency, and made her the confidante of what she meant to do.

Lady Acorn sat aghast. For once in her life she was terrified to silence and meekness. Grace obtained her consent, and the time for the expedition was fixed. Not that Lady Acorn relished it.

"If it be as you and your father believe, Grace, Master Charley Cleveland deserves the soundest shaking man ever had yet," cried she, when speech returned to her.

"Ah, mamma! Then what must Adela deserve?"

"To be in Newgate herself," tartly responded Lady Acorn.

(*To be continued.*)

THE SAPPHIRE CROSS.

BY JOYCE DARRELL.

CHAPTER I.

LUCIA'S NEIGHBOURS.

THE sunset hour had chimed from the church towers all around, and several of Lucia's neighbours were met to gossip in the street. The atmosphere was stifling, the season being summer in Italy. The lurid reflection of the sunken sun cast a sombre glare athwart the dust raised by every step of beast or man along the parched road. At the corner of the street the water-melon vendor had already set up his stall. With a sharp, curved knife he had divided the huge green balls into halves, and laid bare the crimson heart thickly studded with jetty pips.

And this again he was now deftly cutting into wedge-like slices, while a group of ragged children had stopped their screeches and their summersaults to look at him.

It was too hot to move unless inevitably, too hot to think, too hot to talk even, unless the subject were a very thrilling one, such as money, or the shortcomings of one's acquaintances.

The walkers lounged along with the mournful expression of utter ennui. From jalousied windows leaned men in shirt-sleeves smoking, and women in dressing-jackets languidly fanning themselves. Once in a way lumbered along a creaking water-cart, which, with a perfunctory sprinkling made little furrows in the dust.

Opposite the water-melon stall three porters were playing "mora," with a brisk interchange of vituperative epithets and much sacrilegious swearing. Near them a lad was stretched asleep. In the middle of the road lolled a panting dog with its tongue out. Over the sky was a pearly haze. Above the horn of the crescent moon one star glimmered faintly as yet, but grew every moment in splendour and size, as though drawing to itself the dying glory of the western sky. Such was the scene.

And the neighbours? Needless to say that they were of the class which can afford to despise appearances, or they would not have been sitting in the street. There was a brown, thin, brisk little thing called Beppina, who worked as a milliner. The tall, sallow young woman next to her, with an elaborate but untidy coiffure and an unkempt finery of costume, was the daughter of Momo, who kept the café on the piazza. She was arranging the tangled knitting of a blind woman, who was Angela—Lucia's aunt. Hard by, on a door-step, sat a man holding a little child in his arms. His general air, his gaunt cheeks

and hollow eyes betrayed him for a poor workman—a son of toil whose heritage was rich in hardships and scanty in rewards. The pale little daughter—fondly held—leaned her curly head confidently against his shoulder, while her eyes, full of the dumb reverie of childhood, solemnly followed the circling flight of the bats.

"These foreigners are capable of making his fortune," said Angela, enviously, and gave a vicious twist to her needles. "I said to Lucia, 'My poor child! you manage badly. You are too soft. I have always said so. Why have they not done something for you by this time?'"

"Diamine! That would have been the Count's business, not the Countess's," croaked the workman, and the two girls laughed.

"Pezzo d'ignorante!" exclaimed Angela in a fury. "I will thank you to put your glib tongue to some better use than that of hinting slander against my Lucia."

"I meant no harm," said Tito, rather resentfully. "Everybody knows that Lucia is like a saint in a niche. And good with that—how good! Did she not nurse my Isolina for a whole month last winter?" he concluded fondly, as the child, hearing her name, looked up into his face.

"Oh, she is good enough—too good," said Angela, mollified at last. "She can help everybody but herself."

Beppina, recovering from a yawn, here gave the conversation a new turn. "She must be very rich, this Polish countess," said the milliner. "My brother dressed her hair for a masquerade last winter, and he says she has jewels like a queen's."

"They say that she saw Signor Guido at the theatre one night, and was so struck with him that she wrote to him to call upon her the very next morning," related Gigia, the daughter of Momo.

"Think of that!" exclaimed Beppina, profoundly impressed.

"They are shameless, these fine ladies," declared Tito.

"You are a set of prating idiots," coolly remarked Angela. "As for you, Gigia, your tongue wags a great deal too fast. It was my Lucia who introduced Guido to the Countess."

"We all know that Lucia interests herself in the Signor Guido," replied Gigia, but in discreet undertone, and was rewarded by a sympathetic giggle from Beppina.

"The Countess took a fancy to learn the gold embroidery that Lucia does so well, and she had a lesson every morning. You know what Lucia is—so quiet and refined, tanto per bene. The Countess talked to her as she might have talked to her own sister, and told her how she wanted her portrait done. And she said that she wished to find some clever young painter, who was poor. For the Countess is charitable, and she was not born yesterday either. And she knows better than to employ one of your grand artists, who think the world can't do without them, and yet paint no better than anybody else."

"Then how much will she give Guido?" inquired the milliner.

"I don't know," said Angela curtly, and Beppina understood that her curiosity was not to be gratified.

"I daresay Lucia knows," she remarked by way of revenge, with an air of placid spite.

"Yes," said Gigia, catching the infection of courage, "doubtless Lucia knows most of Signor Guido's secrets."

"Lucia knows no secrets, except such as are town-talk," replied Angela swiftly, and with much significance.

Gigia, whose reputation unfortunately was not unblemished, bit her lip, while Tito, malicious like all of his country, sniggered provokingly.

"Are they not soon going—the Count and Countess?" inquired Beppina.

"Very soon. Lucia says they are only waiting until the Count has finished copying a picture in one of the churches."

"Copying a picture! Why does he not make Guido copy it for him?" asked the milliner, scandalised at a rich person doing anything which he could get done for him.

"Mah!" Angela shrugged her shoulders expressively. "It would be more natural of course. But—one knows—foreigners are so odd! The Countess, poveretta! complains all day long of the heat—the heat."

"It is well for her to have no more than that to complain of," sneered Tito.

"You may well say so! Here are we that toil and sweat from dawn to sundown, and what to gain?"

"Bread just enough to starve upon by inches, a bed in the hospital when we sicken, and a grave with four or five other poor wretches when we die," replied Tito.

"And I to be blind besides!" continued Angela. "There's this operation to be performed on my eyes in October. The doctors of the hospital tell me it will succeed, but I have no opinion of doctors. They are mostly knaves when they are not fools."

"But they are generally knaves," said Tito, who liked strong conclusions.

"I am a poor unfortunate creature," declared Angela, with much fervour of self-pity. "There was a bare-footed friar in my paese in the mountains who made wonderful cures."

"Oh, priests!" exclaimed Tito, disdainfully.

"Eccola! Lucia," said Beppina.

Lucia advanced towards them slowly and a little wearily. In the soft, faint light diffused by myriads of stars in the now cloudless sky she was only indistinctly visible. A slight girl, dressed in some dark stuff too heavy for the season, with a kerchief knotted round her slender throat. The head, with its mass of simple plaits, was graceful; the oval of the face was pure; so much could be seen. Had it been brighter, Lucia would have appeared as a girl too grave, too

pale, too thin for striking beauty, but of strangely refined air : with a mouth whose tender plaintiveness was contradicted by the steady, thoughtful look of the dark eyes. And so seeing her, you would have known her for a woman very womanly, more courageous than sanguine, inured to suffering, loving, steadfast, and strong.

"Well ! has she paid you ?" questioned Angela, in a fretful sotto voce, as her niece paused beside her chair.

"Yes," answered Lucia, and her aunt breathed an exclamation of relief.

"It is late," said the girl. "Isoletta here is fast asleep."

"Late ! I should think so," said Angela. "I thought you would never come home."

"I had to go to the shop after the Countess had had her lesson, as the Signora Elisa had left word that she wanted to speak to me. She complains that my last piece of embroidery was not so well done as usual."

"Lies !" observed Angela, decisively. "All an excuse for beating you down. These fine lady shopkeepers, I know them. Well, well ! Run ; buy some bread, child, and let us go upstairs and eat it. Always bread—nothing but bread—eh, Tito ?"

"We eat it with the salt of habit," answered Tito with sententiousness. He was a lover of aphorisms, and troubled himself little about their sense so long as he thought that they sounded striking. A poor journeyman carpenter, and often out of work (for times were bad, and he was too weakly to be skilful), he was not likely to take a very sanguine view of life. His wife had died early of consumption, aggravated by want ; and as to Isoletta it might be said that, more than by scanty food and miserable clothing, she had been kept alive by some occult force in her father's passionate love. She was Tito's great consolation, but he had another. Of an evening, when Isoletta's busy feet were still and her solemn eyes were closed on the hardships of the world, Tito, leaving the door ajar for some kind neighbour to hear her if she cried, would go to a meeting of his Società. This was a revolutionary brotherhood to which he belonged, and where he was comforted by hearing "humanity" exalted and "society" abused. In the minds of the meeting "humanity" meant the numerous and interesting class which, lacking brains and energy, is naturally resentful of success. "Society," on the other hand, signified the whole class of brutal egotists who work for their daily bread. Poor Tito, however, did not understand any of these distinctions ; only it somehow warmed his heart to listen to denunciations of the rich. When very much excited he would make a speech himself, rolling out inflated periods which enchanted him with the facility of their flow, and involving whatever small meaning he had in a coruscant cloud of phrases.

Lucia had returned with the bread, and the little group of gossips had risen to disperse.

"Surely you will come to the festa," Beppina was saying. "Gigia is already gone to dress herself, and you see I am ready. Momo is going with us, and Checco and the Marietta."

"Festa? Fiddlesticks! I shall not go," said Angela contemptuously, yet lingered.

"It will be the best festa the town has had this summer," urged the milliner. "Look round that corner and you will see the lights of the illumination already twinkling."

"What are illuminations and such fiddle-faddles to me, girl? Am I not blind?" replied Angela.

"There is Lucia," murmured Beppina, disconcerted by the reproach.

"Lucia—heaven be praised!—cares nothing for such things."

"I am rather tired," said Lucia, gently. "And besides that we have not supped."

"As to that, our supper is a small matter," remarked her aunt.

"Then, do you wish to go?" questioned Lucia. "There will be a great crowd, and not much that is new to see—even for us," she added tenderly and hesitatingly.

"Not much to see!" echoed Beppina. "Lucia, how you talk! There will be the tombola, and the decorations of the bakers' shops, which are a wonder, and the flags, and the coloured lanterns, and a torchlight procession to finish up with."

"And how can all this amuse her?" asked Lucia in a low voice, indicating her aunt by a gesture.

"Oh, don't make *me* the excuse," exclaimed Angela, in a martyred manner: "go, bambina, go if it amuses you. I can be left alone. What matter about *me*?"

"No, no! you must come also," said everybody in chorus, including Isoletta, whom the magic word festa had recovered from dream-land.

"I will give you my arm," said Tito. This well-meant offer was nearly fatal to all decision, for Angela thought she was being patronised, and resented the liberty as became a woman of spirit. Then Tito was huffed in his turn and had to be conciliated, not without trouble. At length, however, everybody's ruffled feathers were smoothed, and a little later Angela set off in high spirits, leaning on the arm of Momo, in whose favour Tito had retired, and followed by Lucia, Tito himself with Isoletta and the others.

Generally each quarter of an Italian town has its separate patron saint; and when the inhabitants of any particular quarter have a mind to amuse themselves, they celebrate the anniversary of their protector with a festa.

So had it happened on the evening when our story opens, and the saint to be honoured was no less popular a member of the hierarchy than the patron of the guild of bakers—the martyred Lorenzo. While the other parts of the town were gloomy, silent, and deserted

—given up to the flicker of the rare lamps, the rumble of an occasional carriage, and the solemn glory of the stars—in the quarter of San Lorenzo all was life and light and gaiety. Across the narrow streets, from house to house, stretched lines of coloured lamps, with festoons of flowers and flags. From the windows hung carpets and bright squares of cloth: on almost every window-sill were set two lights—a simple, old-fashioned Italian way of illuminating which is curiously effective. Below, streams of people were setting towards the great piazza of the church, which was naturally the culminating point of splendour. There floated upwards through the still night air the sound of footsteps, of voices and laughter, all blended into one, and forming that indescribable hum of a fête which has something so pleasant and something that is so sad.

Round the bakers' shops the crowd was dense, for the richer brethren of the guild had vied with one another in fantastic decorations. Out of dough they had moulded pillars, arches, and spiral columns, recklessly decorated with garlands and hanging baskets formed of vermicelli and ribbon macaroni. Tiny flags and artificial flowers made bits of colour here and there, and brilliant lighting completed the effect. One impassioned republican patriot drew the cream of the applause and the majority of spectators to himself, thanks to the striking and original device of two bound and weeping figures (in dough), representing the enslaved provinces of Istria and Trieste.

"See them! Those infamous Austrians shall not have them much longer to grind down and misgovern. I know what I say, and soon they shall feel the force of the Italian arm," said Tito, threateningly, between the gasps of his asthma, which the crowd had made worse.

"You had better take care first that they shall not feel the weight of Italian taxation," laughingly replied a freshly sonorous voice behind them.

"Oh, Guido!" cried Angela, and Lucia turned but said nothing.

A tall, dark young man, with an earnest face and a mass of bushy hair, had forced his way through the crowd to them. "I never thought to see you here," he said in low tones, with a grave, kind smile to Lucia, and drew her hand protectingly within his arm.

"You may well say that," exclaimed Angela. "I, too, never thought she would want to come. But what would you have? She is a girl like another, after all."

"You saw the Countess to-day," murmured the painter to Lucia as they moved forward. "Did she tell you that she has settled to begin the sittings to-morrow? And she fixed the price herself at five hundred francs, and insisted upon giving me the half of the sum down to-day. Ah! she is as good as she is beautiful."

"That is true," replied Lucia, but her voice trembled slightly.

"I feel as if my fortune were beginning at last, and I am glad that

it should be thanks to you, Lucia. You have been my tutelary saint," he added gratefully, though with a touch of serious playfulness.

She made no answer, rather shrank from him a little. Was it from shyness? Lucia was generally too simple and too sincere to be shy.

From the piazza as they reached it came the harsh cries of the street vendors, and the harsher strains of the band. Some score of stalls were set up in the vast space, and while each vendor tried to out-bellow his neighbour, the band did its brazen best to drown every other sound in the clash of the Garibaldian hymn.

The noise was deafening, the heat stifling, the crowd no doubt jubilant; for it had what it exults in—clamour.

Rows upon rows of tricoloured lights had completely transformed the venerable, weather-beaten façade of the church. Hence bunches of round white lamps, like enchanted fruit, and flimsy Chinese lanterns, cast a weird glimmer upon the frowning fronts and carved stone window-copings of the palaces, straightly shutting in two sides of the square. Here and there an open window with its two lights, its drapery, and the curtains billowed by the evening breeze, suggested that behind those gloomy walls there might yet be life and laughter. Many of the windows were tenanted, the spectators' heads making dim silhouettes against the comparative darkness within. Over all the glitter, all the din, all the memories of the past, all the efforts of the present, stretched the star-spangled canopy of the deep sky.

"That is the house of the Canon Bargilli. He has guests," said Beppina, pointing to a window near the church. Everybody looked up, and Lucia felt Guido's arm quiver.

"Behold her!" said the young man, in a tone of reverent ecstasy.

The Canon and his friends were clearly seen for a moment, as they leaned out of the window, attracted by some incident below. A row of lamps just above them cast a strong light upon their faces, and showed the rubicund, bland Canon in smiling discourse with a lady, whose golden hair was covered with a black lace veil, and on whose slender fingers gems flashed and sparkled, as she drew her host's attention to something in the crowd.

"It is the Countess," said Beppina. "The Sor Canonico thinks he must show her some politeness, I suppose, in return for all the money she has given him for his poor."

CHAPTER II.

THE SAPPHIRE CROSS.

LUCIA was not exactly popular among her neighbours, although she was always willing to do a kind act, and was never heard to utter a harsh word of anybody. But instinctively the girls around her, Beppina, Gigia, and their fellows, inquisitive, gossippy, and a little

idle as they were, shrank from the superiority in her which they could not define.

"She is so proud," they said, whereas she was only reserved. For in character, education, and habits, Lucia was above her surroundings, and it was want of sympathy with these which rendered her silent and caused her to seem proud. Her father was a poor musician who fled to Paris after having been implicated in the political troubles of his country. There he earned a scanty livelihood by playing in orchestras and giving lessons, and there after a time he married a young Breton girl, who was a teacher of languages. She had all the industry, all the steadfast earnestness of her race, and Lucia—the only child of the marriage—had a nature curiously blended of her father's ardour and her mother's Celtic intensity. They destined her for a teacher and gave her a good education, which was, however, interrupted by her mother's untimely death.

Her father, already in broken health, seemed to lose all hope and courage when his wife died, and became possessed by a longing, which nothing could overcome, to look once more upon his beloved and now liberated land. He went back to Italy, and there, in a few months, died, leaving Lucia to the care of his only brother. This brother, who belonged to the order of seductive spendthrifts, had married Angela, a widow, and head of a flourishing embroidery establishment. He spent all his wife's savings; then reduced her to bankruptcy; speculated in the hope of retrieving his, or rather her, position, and, having completed her ruin very shortly after Lucia came to live under his roof, he put an end to his own life by blowing out his brains.

Poor Angela, left not only penniless, but burdened with debts, and with her young orphan niece upon her hands, made a brave struggle for some years. She taught Lucia embroidery, and with her help endeavoured to gather up the scattered threads of her old connection. But she was not very successful, and after a little space of frustrated hope and baffled endeavour, she was stricken with a fresh misfortune in her blindness.

Then the whole burden of their days fell upon Lucia, who toiled indeed early and late, and by dint of industry and self-sacrifice had so far managed to supply the bare necessities of the little household. The two women—the elder with her sightless eyes and the troubled face of one who questions cruel fate unceasingly; the younger every month more thin, more pale, more sorrowfully resolute—hand in hand trod daily the stony round of want. They asked help from no one, for Lucia's proud sensitiveness repressed almost sternly the weak complainings that occasionally broke from her aunt. Angela liked to take credit to herself among her neighbours for her independence, and to blame them at the same time by implication for any meanness which she had detected; but in her secret soul she revolted almost peevishly at times against Lucia's lofty spirit.

The girl, as we have said, was little understood, and not heartily liked. But one there was who appreciated her struggles and her delicate reserve, and that was Guido, the painter. Perhaps his sympathy with her was quickened by the likeness in his own lot and his own nature to hers. For if she had only Angela, he was absolutely alone; if she was very, *very* poor, he had often barely bread to eat; and if she was independent-minded, his pride rose at times almost to a sombre ferocity. He had one passion—Art, and in the pursuit of that passion he was checked and foiled at every turn by his bitter poverty. In the single-mindedness of his purpose, in the inextinguishable fire of endeavour that burnt deep down in his soul, and in his haughty impatience of lower aims and meaner ambitions than his own, he had all the spirit of an ancient master. Austere and self-reliant, he had made for himself even fewer friends in the neighbourhood than Lucia. But he was young, and spite of art, spite of want, spite of pride, a chord of youthful poetry and tenderness vibrated in him.

From his miserable room under the roof, where a chair served him for an easel and a straw mattress for a bed, looking down across the little court to the first floor, he could see Lucia at her window. And when he had watched her for a few moments, with her graceful head bent over her work, or had seen her in the early morning give seed to her canary or water her plants, he felt consoled in part for the squalor and the din of the court, for the yelling children, the slatternly women, and all the other hideous sights and sounds which grated upon his artistic sense, and made life a constant torture to him. He was months in the house before he came to know her; for he felt a strange, fanciful shrinking at first from seeing her too close, liking to imagine things about her which he feared that a nearer knowledge might dispel. Half reluctantly he was attracted to her.

One day he helped her to draw up her bucket from the well in the court; then left her as she would have thanked him. Another time, meeting her overlaid on the stairs, he took her burdens from her. Once he gave his arm to Angela, who was greatly flattered by the attention. Always eager for novelty and news, and more so than ever now in her blindness, she invited him to come to see her, with less of caution than she might under other circumstances have entered upon an acquaintance with a young man. The invitation had to be repeated two or times before he availed himself of it; but at last he came.

By degrees he fell into the habit of looking in for an hour or so of an evening, and often he made sketches of Lucia's hands, or of her pretty head. Very silent himself, he listened patiently to all Angela's babble, and sometimes, although rarely, he was led to talk a little about his own wishes and aims. He told them how, when a lad in the mountains of Calabria, his talent for drawing had attracted

the attention of a gentleman, who had brought the boy with him to his own town, and there entered him as a pupil at an art institute, promising him, if he worked, that he should be protected also in the future. Guido had studied with all the ardour of which he was capable, and that was infinite ; but he had hardly concluded the three years' curriculum when his generous friend died. Then it was that poverty, hardship, and disappointment had begun for him, for, without interest or money, he had to struggle in the teeth of difficulties that would have quenched any ambition less fiery than his own.

"I should envy nobody on earth," he said once, in a burst of unusual confidence to Lucia, "if only I could earn now just so much money as would help me to pay 'a model for my picture.'" And it was this desire which Lucia had sought to gratify by introducing him to the Polish Countess, of whom we have heard so much already from Angela.

Needless to say that, to their neighbours, the artist's friendship with the blind woman and her niece was a fruitful source of gossip. Beppina and Gigia, who had been much attracted by the handsome, severe young painter on his first appearance among them, were not unnaturally disgusted at the indifference which he had displayed to their charms. And when it appeared that Lucia possessed the power which they lacked to soften such a savage, their interest in the supposed love affair gained piquancy from some slight mixture of true feminine spite.

But was it a love affair ?

Natures like Lucia's, so self-sustained, like Guido's, so concentrated, are less subject than others to sudden onsets of passion. If they were in love they hardly realised the fact as yet. It is true, however, that at times Lucia's eyes had a soft, dreamy light that was new to them, and Guido also, to a close observer, would have seemed less sad than of old. But possibly he was at an age and in a frame of mind when love, to be rapid, must have some sharp flavour of a "glad surprise."

Lucia was not one of the women who attract suddenly ; she unfolded the best of herself only by degrees. Of her it might truly be said that "the charm of her presence was felt when she went."

"Permesso?" said Guido's voice one evening, at the usual hour, and his picturesque head appeared inside Angela's door. "May I come in?"

"Come in—come in," answered Angela. "I am sure we are only too thankful to see anybody—let alone you, Guido."

"I always feel at home here," said the young man, as he took Lucia's slender hand. "What is it you do to your room, Signora Lucia, to make it so different from, and so much nicer than anybody else's?"

"You flatter," said Lucia, with a smile and a faint blush of pleasure ; "what is there in the poor little room after all?" What

was there, truly? A sweet smell of mignonette from the box in the window; a little stir of happy dreaming from the pet canary in its cage; a bunch of white stocks before the statuette of the Madonna on the old worm-eaten chest; a few books. Very little, after all. But that all belonged to Lucia, and had something of her sweet, pure self.

"I have good news," said Guido, at the end of half an hour or so, when Angela had exhausted all the gossip of the street. "Pietro Siccoli, whom I knew at the Institute, has offered me the use of the half of his studio for the few weeks that the artist who generally shares it with him is away. It has a splendid light, and now that I have money to pay a model I shall get on with my picture, especially as Pietro will lend me stuffs. I have taken a room close to the studio, and I shall move there to-morrow."

"And that is what you call good news!" cried Angela. "You care nothing, then, for the friends you leave?"

Lucia bent her head closer over her work, and said simply, "I am glad for you, Signor Guido."

In answer to Angela, Guido broke out into protest. Could they think him so ungrateful? Did he not owe his present good luck to the Signora Lucia? He would never forget that. He would come to see them continually. But he must think of his art, and he could paint his picture so much better in the studio with Pietro.

"Yes, and fall into evil habits among a set of idle painters—worthless spendthrifts all of them," grumbled Angela, and added so much more to the same effect that the artist, smiling, rose at last to take his leave, fairly driven away by her scolding.

Holding the light, Lucia went with him to the landing outside the door. There she drew a little parcel from her pocket, and unfolding it displayed a small sapphire cross.

"Bella!" cried Guido. "Where did you get it?"

"The Contessa gave it me," replied Lucia.

"Ah!" Guido's voice had a tender inflection, and he took the jewel from Lucia's hands with an interest that did not escape her.

"She gave it you? Ah! She is good, is she not?"

"She wanted to give me money—more, I mean, than I had earned by the lessons—but I would not accept it," continued Lucia, in a hard, businesslike tone. "So she forced this cross upon me, with tears in her eyes. Our quarter's rent is due again to-morrow, and last winter, when the aunt was ill, I got into arrears with it, and now I must raise money on something. I had rather this went than anything more useful. Will you take it to the Monte di Pietà for me?"

"It seems a pity to part with it, too," said Guido, dreamily, twisting the cross about to catch the light upon its stones. "I have seen it on her neck."

"So have I," answered Lucia, curtly. "But you will take it, will you not? And please say nothing about it to my aunt. You know

what she is. She worries herself so much about all our troubles. I tell her as rarely as possible when the money runs short."

"Good," said Guido. Then, after a moment's hesitation, he asked, "Have you seen her lately?"

"The Countess? To-day. It was then she gave me the cross. I think she wanted to make up to me for having stopped the lessons."

"She has also stopped the sittings," replied Guido, in rather a discontented manner. "But she writes always to say she will resume them 'to-morrow, or next day.'"

"I think she is a little capricious," said Lucia.

"I think she is very unhappy," exclaimed the painter, warmly. "Her husband——"

"What is all this gossiping about? If you want to talk, cannot you talk inside?" asked Angela, rather crossly, having groped her way to the door. Consequently Guido did not finish his sentence, but hastily saying "Good-night!" sprang up the stairs.

The next day, as Lucia was descending with a parcel of work, she met him, and he put fifty francs into her hand.

"So much?" said the girl. "And where is the pawn-ticket?"

"The ticket? Well—you see—unfortunately I lost it. But it does not matter, Signora Lucia. I remember the number, and the old Jew knows me, so I shall be able to get your cross back for you whenever you want it." And with suspicious promptitude Guido left her.

CHAPTER III.

THE COUNTESS.

COUNTESS WANDA CIORONSKI had not been very long in the neighbourhood; but the few months that had elapsed since she came had sufficed for her to fascinate the popular imagination like a miraculous Madonna. Her beauty, her golden hair, her fantastic grace, her rich attire, her thousand whims and million caprices, were an enduring source of wonder and inexhaustible theme of gossip. Moreover, she had an impulsive and somewhat fickle, yet royal, benevolence. A tale of a sick child or a bedridden crone would reach her ears, and the next hour would see her in the squalid garret, laden with gifts. One or two such deeds as this had set all the beggars in motion. Countess Wanda was beset by the lame, the halt, and the blind, every time her lovely head appeared beneath the heavy portal of the old palazzo where she dwelt. Soon the applicants grew bolder, and her very staircase was stormed, till at last the Count had to interfere.

But although he regulated his wife's charities, he did not forbid them, and the Countess continued to scatter her money with a whimsical generosity which seemed to form the basis of her sparkling and inconstant nature. For the foam of the sea is not lighter,

the shadow on the hill-side not more shifting, the mirage not more delusive, than was this enchanting woman. She obeyed no law but her own caprice, and her caprice had no more conscient motive than the gossamer blown by the wind. Those who knew her best found her most unaccountable, and those who knew her least were spell-bound by her charm.

She was subject to fancies of the most violent and the least lasting kind. One of these fancies she had taken to Lucia; and when Lucia had recommended Guido to her, she had immediately jumped to the conclusion that the charming young embroideress and the struggling young painter were betrothed. How delightful it would be, she thought, to enable them to marry. She was as pleased with the notion as a babe with its new coral and bells, and received Guido on his first appearance with such irresistible grace that the ardent and amazed young man did not know if he were standing on his head or his heels. He thought he had never seen any woman so divinely lovely; and that was an opinion which many men had had before him. For the Countess was tall, graceful, and so exquisitely fair that (to borrow a metaphor from Dante) a pearl would hardly have been visible on her brow.

"You must scold me if I do not pose properly, monsieur," she said with winning frankness, in her pretty, broken Italian. "I assure you I am more anxious for you even than for myself, that this portrait should be a success."

And she sat beautifully, but managed all the same to talk a good deal, and questioned Guido so dexterously about himself, that she extracted more from him in that one hour than Lucia had done in a month.

On her side she was delighted with the young man's earnest modesty: so much so that, at the second sitting, she talked to him of herself. She became almost confidential; hinted that she was unhappy; spoke tenderly of her absent mother; and declared that the greatest sorrow of her life had been the untimely death of a beloved sister.

"Here is her portrait, monsieur. Dear Elise! She died so young—of consumption. Was she not lovely?" and the Countess raised her large blue-grey eyes, suffused with tears, to Guido's face.

The painter—soft-hearted like all his countrymen—took the miniature and looked at it in emotional silence. He would have liked to say that the living sister was infinitely more beautiful than the dead one: but he did not dare.

"We were always together," continued the Countess, dreamily and mournfully. "We made plans—pretty, girlish plans—for never separating. I nearly broke my heart when she died. And with her died all my happiness."

"Oh, do not say that!" exclaimed Guido, deeply touched. "You so young, so good, so ——" (the word "beautiful" died on

his lips). "Is not everyone who knows you too glad to make you happy?"

She looked at him with a tearful, pleased smile, as one looks at a child.

"Poor boy," she murmured. "You still believe in chivalry and devotion. But there! we will talk of something else. See, you shall do a large portrait from this miniature of my dear, lost Elise. It shall be a companion to mine. I should like it to be finished by the twentieth of this month, which was her birthday. Can you finish it by then?"

Guido naturally, in that moment of enthusiasm, would have promised to create a new world by the twentieth.

"Delightful!" said the Countess, her tears banished by smiles. "You will work at my portrait in the morning here, and at Elise's in your studio of an afternoon. It will be like a fresh link between her and me. Poor Elise! You have never had a sister, monsieur?"

"No," Guido answered. Except for an old great-uncle in Calabria, a priest, he was without kith or kin.

"Poor boy!" murmured the Countess once again. Guido did not like being pitied as a rule, but the flush which rose to his brow at her glance and tone was not one of wounded pride.

"You must let me help you," she continued. "At any rate, to do good is a lasting happiness. Hélas! it is the one ideal which does not turn, like fairy gifts, to ashes in one's hand. I will get you work among all my friends."

This sounded like patronage. Guido bent his head in acknowledgment a little haughtily. Possibly the Countess, with her quick tact, felt her mistake. "You will let me be kind to you, I hope," she said sweetly, and stretched out her little white hand, all sparkling with jewels.

Vanquished, speechless, Guido bowed reverently over the slender, fluttering fingers: then yielded to the most obvious of all temptations, and kissed them.

A croaking, evil laugh, which broke the stillness, made him start as if shot. A gentleman, unobserved, had entered the room, and stood watching the pretty scene.

"Toujours la même, ma chère," he said, in a tone of icy mockery, as he came forward. Guido did not understand the words, but it was not difficult for him to guess that the intruder was the Count. He bowed, then drew himself up and stood silent, unconsciously by his natural, simple dignity taking all the ridicule out of the situation. The Countess gave him a plaintive glance, but it was probably only her artistic sense which inspired it, for she did not seem particularly disconcerted.

"This is Signor Zondara, the young painter of whom I told you," she said to her husband.

"Ah!" said Count Cioronski, and bowed in his turn, very politely.

Guido, looking at him, felt a chill of repulsion. The Count, elegant, and, to a certain degree, even handsome as he was, had the air of a man on whom a blight has fallen. His pallid face recalled countless portraits which hang in galleries abroad—portraits of princely scions of some cruel, extenuated race, in which the strength of a founder has worn itself down to a fitful lust of gold or blood, and the seed of stormy energy yielded a harvest of disease.

"Mon ami," said the Countess, "monsieur could tell you where to go for a frame for your St. Sebastian."

"True," answered her husband, and, turning to Guido, entered with courtesy and ease into conversation with him, first about the frame, then about art in general. He was agreeable, affable, talked intelligently; yet Guido had all the time an irritating sense of being patronised, and as soon as it was possible he rose to go. His instinctive aversion to the Count grew to positive dislike as he reflected upon his appearance, his looks, his tones. With his excitable southern imagination he jumped to the conclusion that the lovely Countess was in the power of a kind of modern Bluebeard, and his blood boiled with indignation and generous pity. By the following morning he had convinced himself that she was habitually beaten, perhaps occasionally half starved; and it was with a thrill of almost painful excitement that he found himself again in her presence.

To his great astonishment she received him somewhat coldly, although graciously still. The truth was she was absorbed in meditation over a new toilette, her husband having at last announced that he would soon be ready to leave for Switzerland. But, of course, Guido could not know this, and his perplexity was great. Presently the Count appeared, dressed in a cool suit of gray, and evidently in the best of spirits. With his pale, steely smile, and sharp tones of gaiety, Guido found him no whit more genial than on the previous day. And yet he was amiability personified, and, as the amazed painter noticed, on the best of terms with his wife. He laughed and talked with her in rapid French and Polish, while she lent a half-petulant obedience to Guido's admonitions to hold her head steady and keep her face at the proper angle for the portrait. Finally, the Count proposed an expedition into the country, and the Countess clapped her hands in childish glee.

"Mais oui! mais oui! ce sera ravissant. Monsieur," turning to Guido, "you will forgive me, will you not? To-day is cool, and I shall enjoy myself. To-morrow that dreadful heat may return. Oh, yes! you will forgive me, I know. To-morrow? I do not know that I shall sit to-morrow. I may be tired. But you will make haste and finish the portrait of dear Elise. Yes! That will be kind." And

with an enchanting smile of absolute indifference the Countess fluttered off to dress, while the Count bowed Guido out.

For two or three days the artist awaited a summons from the Countess, but received it not. Too shy to write to her, he bore the disappointment with what patience he could, but at last he conceived the happy thought of calling upon the Count himself, with the information which he had asked for about the frames.

And on the very evening of the day on which Lucia had received from him the fifty francs he went.

On the same evening, and about the same hour, Tito, half wild with anxiety, had summoned Lucia to the bedside of his little Isoletta.

"Will you come to her for a little?" he prayed, haggard and breathless. "Cecchina is with her, but she asks for you. I will be back soon. I only go to a friend for money."

"Of course, I will go directly," answered Lucia, warmly. "What is it? Convulsions?"

"Starvation," answered Tito, grimly. "The doctor came just now, when I thought she was dying. He said that her throat was better, and that she should have some strong broth and a little wine. It's easy talking. Except some soup that Cecchina brought Isoletta, there has been no food in the house since yesterday, and I have earned no money for a fortnight and more."

Lucia impulsively put her hand in her pocket, but, alas! her own purse was empty. The rent which she had paid that afternoon had exhausted it. The scanty savings of many months, the week's earnings, and the proceeds of the cross—all were gone.

"Let me go and get some food!" she exclaimed. "The people know me. They will give me credit."

"And how shall I pay you?" asked Tito, with a bitter smile. "No, no, Signora Lucia, you are poor and you have helped me before; let me go to my friend. He belongs to our Società. He will help me, if he can."

"And if he cannot?" said Lucia.

Tito shrugged his shoulders with a sinister gesture of despair. "There are the rich," he answered, and went.

Poor little Isoletta lay like a corpse—so white, so still, so diaphanous in the pale moonbeams that, faint and ghost-like, illumined her bed. She moaned and started in her troubled sleep as Lucia bent over her, and her poor, tiny, wasted hand clutched feverishly at the sheet, her parched lips moved piteously.

"She sleeps. Will you stay with her for a little?" whispered Cecchina, a wizened, untidy little hunchback, with bright eyes like a bird.

Lucia nodded, and Cecchina, pocketing her knitting, noiselessly went.

Lucia sat for awhile by the bed, her compassionate eyes fixed on the small pathetic figure. She recalled the child's winning ways, her

happy smiles and wondering glances, her little world of unconscious joy in a big world of want and desolation, and so remembering her she felt a sob rise in her throat at the thought that perhaps already the short sum of Isoletta's days was spent. Oppressed by the loneliness, and restlessly anxious for Tito's return, she rose and went softly to the window.

It was a night such as we in England never dream of—a night of indescribable heat, and of most uncanny splendour. Over all things brooded the stifling sirocco; its burning breath came in baneful gusts that seemed like exhalations from a witch's cauldron. The quaint, tortuous streets, the sculptured gables of the dark, lofty houses, the yawning archways, were etherealised, transfigured by the intense white radiance of the moon. And yet, beautiful as the hour was, its spell had more of the weird than of the divine. There was some touch of mystic cruelty, of ghostly mockery in its maddening stillness and its inexorable calm.

In such electrical hours every feeling is at fever heat, and emotion with startling rapidity flames into crime.

"Ohé Pietro!" called a voice through the silence, and a man came running down the street to meet another. "A pistol-shot—murder—the guardie have just hurried past. Will you come to see?"

"Where? where?" cried the other. "How do you know?"

"I was passing. I heard the people say it. It is in ——"

Lucia leaned excitedly from the window. Surely he had mentioned—then she smiled at her own imagination. Two men had fallen out, and one had drawn a knife on the other, probably. The pistol-shot would be the mushroom growth of fancy. Very likely the wound was not even mortal. Such things are of constant recurrence in Italy.

Twenty minutes or so passed, then she heard Tito's step on the stairs. At the same moment Isoletta awoke in a startled way, calling out "Babbo! babbo!"

"Isoletta! see! I am returned. I have brought thee food, wine, and money for more," and Tito, pale with emotion and hurry, threw a heap of lire on the table.

"You found your friend, then?" said Lucia, pleased; but Tito was hunting for a glass and did not answer her.

"Two men in the street just now were speaking of a pistol-shot. Did you hear it?" asked the girl.

"Not I," said he. "I heard nothing. I should not have heard an earthquake, I think. I was thinking only of Isoletta here," and with a trembling hand he raised his darling's head, and put the life-giving draught to her lips.

CHAPTER IV.

BEPPINA'S NEWS.

SIX o'clock the next evening found Lucia busily working, as she had been busily working all day. For it was Saturday, and only if she took her finished task to the shop before nightfall could she expect to be paid. Growing every moment paler, every moment wearier, she plied her needle with a kind of mechanical persistency, feeling that to stop for a moment would be to give up altogether.

Angela sat half-asleep by the window, with a cloud of flies buzzing round her head. Every now and again she awoke with a start to brush them off, then, with a fretful groan, relapsed into slumber. From the main street hard by came the harsh shouts of the newspaper vendors. They seemed to have some greater news than usual, but, probably despairing of a public there, they had not penetrated to the little piazzetta where Lucia lived.

Suddenly hurrying feet came up the stairs, and Angela raised her head, with a quick presentiment of some agreeable novelty. Beppina, breathless with excitement, exultant with the importance of a news-bringer, burst into the room.

"Have you heard? The Countess—your Countess, Lucia—has been murdered by Guido, the painter!"

"Guido!" shrieked Angela, springing to her feet, and turning her eyes on the speaker in sightless anger. "Shame! shame on you, Beppina, to carry such tales!"

Lucia had looked up, and perhaps she also had spoken. But if so, her exclamation had passed unheeded. She sat with pallid, parted lips, as motionless as though the news, like a poisoned arrow, had transfixed her dead to her chair.

"I carry no tales but true ones," said Beppina, indignantly, and half crying with agitation. "I only heard it just now, as I came home. The whole town knew it before me. You are always accusing me of telling lies. The *Avanguardia* has just come out with the whole account. Momo has bought it and is going to read it to us . . . I thought you would like to listen . . . I was a fool . . . I ought to have stayed downstairs . . . You are very unkind . . . I shall go."

"No, stop! I will go with you," said Angela, eagerly.

"What is the matter?" asked a voice at the door. It was Tito, come to give news of Isoletta. He had not slept all night, of course, and looked horribly haggard and wan. Delighted to have a new listener, the milliner poured out her story, interrupted by many exclamations from Angela.

"All newspapers are liars," growled Tito. "Isoletta is better, Signora Lucia." Then he turned his back and walked downstairs,

Beppina staring after him. What had come to the people to make them take her news in such a spirit?

"Come! let us go down," said Angela, impatiently. "Momo will have got through the whole article soon, and then nobody will think of telling me anything. I am only a poor, blind woman. My amusement is a small matter."

"Won't you come too, Lucia?" asked Beppina, glancing at her curiously, and disappointed, for she had looked forward to a scene.

"Lucia has her work to finish," interposed Angela, trembling with eagerness to begone. And, leaning on Beppina's arm, she stumbled down the stairs.

Left alone, Lucia raised her hand to her forehead, and pushed back her hair restlessly, as though its weight oppressed her. She looked round the room as if in search of something, like a person waking in some unfamiliar spot. Her eyes fell on her work, which had slipped to the ground. Habit is a kind of goad. She must finish that, at any rate, she thought, and, raising it, fell to stitching swiftly as before. She was curiously calm—so much so that she almost wondered at herself. The moment when Beppina's words had given her that dreadful shock seemed hours off already. An abyss of dull amaze had yawned in her soul, and every violent emotion had glided down it. She could hear what the news-sellers shouted now with startling distinctness. They rang the changes on the murder, the arrest—how often had she heard them call out similar facts before! Their words sounded horribly commonplace, with just one added touch of inconceivable novelty. If she could only get rid of this feeling of stupor, which hurt her like some bruising pressure!

Holding her work in front of her, she examined it critically, saying to herself that before the light failed it would be finished. . . . Then all at once she dropped it; rose from her seat; locked the door of the house behind her, and ran down the stairs, and out into the sickening, foul heat of the street. She hurried past the curious little group of listeners gathered round Momo, unconsciously wincing as a fragment of the reading reached her ears.

"Where are you going? Have you finished your work?" called out Angela, hearing that she had passed.

But Lucia did not answer, only hastened on, with such a white, set face that everybody who met her looked at her in pity. She walked mechanically, making straight for her goal, but heeding nothing by the way, until she reached at last a part of the town where reigned an almost cloistral silence. It had once been a quarter of convents, and tall walls stretched away on either side, shutting out the sight but not the rustle of the gardens, where parched acacia blossoms dropped, one by one, to the ground. Here Lucia paused for a moment, briefly asked her way, and turning down the street pointed out to her, found

herself in front of the town prison. A sentinel was before the door. She went up to him.

"Was Guido Zondara brought here to-day?—he is a painter," she added impatiently, as the soldier stared at her in surprise.

"I don't know. Ask the porter," he replied, and resumed his impassibility.

Lucia turned to the porter, and repeated her question in the very same words.

"Do you suppose I know the names of all the people who are brought here?" said that functionary, munching a hunk of bread and salame. "You must ask there," and he pointed to a kind of bureau within the court. But a woman standing by, talking to one of the jailors, had heard Lucia's question.

"A painter?" she repeated. "Why, of course, it was that handsome lad brought this afternoon for murder. You know him? Poor thing! poor thing!" and the shrill tones subsided into a cadence of passing sympathy, and the black eyes fixed themselves on Lucia with inquisitive interest.

"You can be allowed to see him on visitors' day," said the porter, answering the glance, more fraught with despairing longing than she guessed, which the girl had cast through the sombre doorway to the building beyond.

"You are his sweetheart, perhaps?" questioned the woman.

"No," said Lucia, "I am nothing to him." Then she turned and left them. The sight of the prison, the knowledge that Guido was really there, had roused her from her apathy, and awakened in her an intolerable pain. The formless horror and incredulity which had oppressed her brain suddenly lifted, and were succeeded by a rush of ghastly images. An overpowering desire to know more, to get closer, as it were, to the hideous fact, possessed her. She quickened her steps, and in a short time found herself in front of the palace where the murdered woman had dwelt. Two men with flaming torches stood at the door, and the portal was full of the white-robed, white-hooded Brothers who, in Italy, carry the dead. Evidently the funeral was about to take place.

A small pony-carriage dashed up, inside which were two ladies, friends of Countess Wanda, whom Lucia knew by sight.

They had brought a cross of gardenias and Cape jessamine, to lay upon the coffin; and now looked round for somebody who would carry it upstairs.

Divining their desire, Lucia went forward, eagerly. "I will take it."

"Ah! c'est la petite brodeuse! Poor Wanda was kind to her. Yes, give the cross to her to take," said one of the ladies, glad to be released from the necessity of exertion on such a sultry night.

Swiftly, silently, Lucia passed up the stairs, through the groups of Brothers, of servants, and of guests with long faces of assumed

solemnity, that broke every now and again into smiles of real indifference.

On the landing stood two gentlemen talking.

"I was at the baths of Lucca, and came up this afternoon as soon as I received the telegram. Poor woman! so beautiful! so young! such a tragic end!" said one.

"Cioronski is overwhelmed, I suppose?" observed the other.

"To tell you the truth," answered the first speaker, lowering his voice confidentially, "I am quite uneasy about him. His conduct is strange. This morning he was wildly excited; asked endless questions; hurried on all the formalities; insisted upon the body being removed to-night, saying he could not be another night in the same house with it. And yet he would not leave, though of course everybody was profuse in invitations. Up to an hour ago he would not approach the corpse, only insisted perpetually that it must 'Go—go.' And now, there he is in the room with it, kneeling by the coffin, praying perhaps, and nobody dares go near him, his manner is so distraught."

"Is there not—you understand?" said the other gentleman, significantly tapping his forehead.

At this moment they perceived Lucia behind them, and heard at last her softly-spoken request to pass. They moved aside, and she went on. She had heard what they were saying, but apparently had not heeded it; or else the dumb fascination of horror which possessed her left no room in her mind for scruples. Impelled by an irresistible impulse, she made straight for a door slightly ajar, through which streamed a flood of light, and a heavy scent of incense and of flowers. A servant darted forward to prevent her entering, but was not in time. Bearing the cross of flowers she advanced, noiseless as a spirit and almost as pale.

The murdered woman was known to have loved light, and perhaps for that reason tapers had been multiplied round her coffin, until the blaze was almost dazzling. She lay in their lustre, surrounded and covered with flowers, her face alone visible.

With a throb of agony and awe Lucia recognised the outstretched wax-like figure, the little golden head, and was seized by the solemn wonder of the living at the newborn mystery shrouding the familiar figure of the dead. She moved a step nearer, breathless, her heart-beats sounding loudly through the silence. Dead? No! Surely some mighty longing would revive her, as the touch of the Redeemer raised the lifeless of old. Lucia mechanically stretched out her arms, a sob of speechless desire parting her sad lips. Was it only the flicker of the tapers, or a returning breath that quivered on the marble cheek?

"Wanda!"

The name breathed through the room like a sigh, but Lucia never knew that she had spoken. She stood rapt, chilled by a

sense of the eternally irrevocable, and yet trembling with a vague expectancy.

There was a slight stir, and, from the other side of the coffin, where he had been kneeling unobserved by Lucia, Count Cioronski rose, with a face so livid, so altered out of all knowledge, that she shrank from him as from a ghost. He stared at her for a moment in silence; then all at once his countenance changed, an expression compounded of fury and of terror swept across it, and with a stealthy spring, like a wild beast's, he threw himself upon her and seized her by the throat. A short, silent struggle took place between them; but Lucia's slender hands were no match for the muscular ones that held her, strengthened as they were by some maniacal instinct of blood. Already half-suffocated she had sunk to the ground, when the door was thrown violently backwards, and the terrified servants rushed in. The guests followed, and two men catching the Count in their arms, forced him to release his grasp. He wrestled with them for a moment, then fell back insensible and foaming at the mouth.

The maids, meanwhile, had dragged the half-fainting Lucia into the antechamber, and there loosened her dress and dashed water in her face. With a moan she came to herself after a few moments, and looked at them with bewildered eyes.

"Madonna santa!" said one of them, "why did you go in? It was a mere chance that through the door I caught sight of him holding you. I have seen him in awful rages before, but never like this."

A gentleman came out hurriedly.

"How is the girl?" he asked. "Ah! better. Send for a doctor, Carlotta. The Count is in an epileptic fit."

An hour later poor Countess Wanda's funeral streamed slowly down the street, with all the pomp that flaming torches, chanting priests, and decorous mourners could give it.

A great crowd had gathered along its passage, and by the time the procession reached the cemetery it had been swelled by a number of humble followers. These were some of the many sufferers whom the generous hand of the murdered woman had succoured.

(To be continued.)

HUGH LATIMER.

ONE afternoon in the year 1490, a man, wearing the dress of a common country farmer of that day, might have been seen crossing the rich green fields near the village of Thurcaston in Leicestershire. His face seemed to show that he was in no very cheerful frame of mind. The weather had been gloomy, the crops were looking bad, one of the very best bullocks had just gone the wrong way. Altogether the farmer was not disposed, that evening, to take a very bright view of life, especially of his own share of it.

But when he drew near his own door, the door where the porch was all ablush with red roses, his face suddenly lit up with a look of anxious interest. There was a sound in the house which had not been in it when he left it this morning : it was the cry of a child. With quick steps his heavy mud-stained boots crossed the threshold. There, from a group of gossips, he heard that there was born to him a son.

That boy was christened Hugh, and was to leave a story written on the page of English history which would have nothing to do with farm-yards or cattle-breeding. He was to be known, in after time, as Hugh Latimer, the champion of God even to the death.

Hugh's childhood was very like the childhood of any other boy of his day who was in his position of life : that is to say, it was like the childhood of others in all its outward surroundings. There was the store of legendary lore learnt at his mother's knee ; there was the rough and ready initiation into the everyday ways and habits of the world, which, in that age, fell to the lot of a lad in Hugh Latimer's rank of life ; there were frequent visits to the house of the parish priest, who was the unfailing patron of every intelligent village boy, to pick up fragments of Greek and Latin, and of gentle manners above his station ; fragments which a quick-witted lad like Hugh Latimer would soon join together, till they became a harmonious whole that determined the course of his future story.

The childhood of Hugh Latimer must have had yet another thing, which did not belong to every home then, which does not belong to every home now. That other thing was a solid groundwork of high principle and pure feeling. We know neither the name nor the lineage of Hugh Latimer's mother. She may have been the daughter of some wealthy yeoman who descended a few steps to marry the small farmer, or she may have been once a waiting-maid who arranged the silken robes of some grand lady. No pen or pencil has told us whether her hair was tinged with Norman black or Saxon brown. But still, between the lines of her great son's story, we can see her influence written as by a recording angel's loving finger.

Thus time went on, while year by year strengthening limbs and firm elastic steps told of vigorous bodily development in breeze and sunshine; while year by year, through books partly borrowed and partly bought by hard-earned savings, his young mind drank deeper from the well of knowledge; while year by year the young spirit looked out bolder and with a steadier gaze into life. Thus time went on, until the boy had become a youth. And now what was to be his lot? Was he to stick to the plough and the spade of his forefathers, or was he to try to spring into some higher walk of life? His intellect and his whole nature made him long for different companionship and different employment from that he found in the old Leicestershire farmhouse; but there seemed little hope of his gaining either.

In truth, in those days of slow progress and rigid barriers between class and class, it appeared a very vain dream to think of the small farmer's son treading college halls at the side of young nobles and high-born gentlemen, and rising to be the friend of a king. But God had work for him to do in high places, and thither now He began to guide his steps. Latimer had, as yet, no idea of the glorious task his Lord was going to lay upon him. His religious convictions were, at present, all on the side of the Roman Catholic Church, which had, in some degree, befriended him, and helped him into the path of secular learning. But the Almighty Hand was leading him on towards the light, though he himself knew it not. Through the name made for him by his own already brilliant talents in his native county, through the generous kindness of some neighbouring gentlemen of rank and wealth, he was sent to Cambridge, and thus his first step upward was assured to him.

At Cambridge he soon made his mark. He gathered swiftly the golden fruit of all academic honours, and his strong individuality quickly made him both friends and enemies in the university. Every one that was brought into near contact with him saw plainly enough that here was one of the rising men of the young generation. He was not, however, exactly a popular man in his college. His words were too keen and brisk, his whole being too bristling with lively, original force for that: but where he won a heart he never lost it again.

Hugh Latimer was, at this period, sufficiently attached to the Roman Catholic Church to resolve to enter her priesthood: the clerical profession seemed to him the one which would suit him best, on account of his love of study. Accordingly, when he reached the usual age, he took holy orders. It was quite impossible for the restless energy of his nature to remain long in any position without making some active movement in it. Before much time had passed, therefore, after his becoming a priest, we find Latimer delivering lectures at Cambridge, in which he combated some of the opinions of the reformers.

But the young warrior was very soon to buckle on his armour in a different cause.

One day there came into the hall where the lecturer was hurling the keen darts of his oratory at the ranks of Protestantism, a plainly-dressed, middle-aged man, with a grave uncompromising mouth, but with a wondrous, calm sunshine in his eyes—sunshine which seemed to stream out from the radiance of the soul within. No one took any particular notice of him, and he sat down in a corner. When he first fixed his attention on the lecturer, as he did throughout in the most marked way, there was stern opposition in his glance, but, by degrees, that unfriendly look turned to one of admiration, and then his face grew very earnest and thoughtful, and then he gazed again eagerly at the speaker, and then he murmured, "He shall be God's and ours! He shall be God's and ours!"

The lecture was over, and Latimer had returned to his own lodging when there came a knock at the house door. Was it one of the dons come to compliment him on the way in which he had stood, to-day, by the rights of the clergy, he wondered, as he heard a quick, resolute step ascending the stairs. The room door opened, and a man, who was an utter stranger to Latimer, stood before him. He was the man, with sunshine in his eyes, who, without the speaker being aware of his presence, had been listening to his lecture.

"Who are you, sir, and what would you with me?" asked Latimer, in surprise.

"I am Thomas Bilney," was the answer, "and I come to make thee, Hugh Latimer, a changed man from this day."

At the name of Bilney, which was, at that period, as a trumpet's blast throughout the camp of the English reformers, Latimer started, and a flash of anger from his fiery glance met the bright, steadfast gaze of the man who stood before him, calm as a summer cloud, yet boldly assured as an angel which had just come down from God with a message.

At first Latimer refused to have any intercourse with his unexpected and unwelcome guest. But the persuasive sweetness of Bilney's manner at length melted his coldness and distrust, and gradually he fell into talk and discussion with him. Before Bilney left his room that day, Latimer was beginning to look at the reformed doctrines with a very different eye from what he had ever done hitherto. He studied the scriptures in the new light which was shining in upon him. God's grace worked in his heart and mind, together with his new friend's teaching, for friends the two had become, though they had met as antagonists. His vigorous intellect and warm, brave spirit soon grasped hold of the glorious truths which were now presented to him. He was far too honest and bold not to confess, at once, his altered convictions, and it was rapidly spread abroad that Hugh Latimer was numbered among the opponents of the Church of Rome.

Just at this moment, when Latimer's views changed, to be a reformer was not exactly to play a losing game in a merely worldly point of aspect in England. It was one of those periods in Henry

VIII.'s life when he took it into his head to be a Protestant, and to favour Protestantism in all things. Latimer's new friends knew this, and resolved to introduce him at Court. He was just the sort of man they wanted to place near the King.

One day there waited in the ante-chamber of King Henry's reception room a singularly contrasted pair. One wore a long black gown and a heavy gold chain: his whole manner and bearing, even to the very tone of his softly modulated voice, were full of the most studied, courtly grace. He was spruce elegance itself, from the jaunty little beaver cap stuck slightly on one side upon his perfumed hair, to the diamond that glittered on his delicate white hand: his very approach seemed to bring with it a smell of rare precious odours, and an atmosphere of dignified forms.

The other wore a doublet made of a somewhat coarser stuff, and of a decidedly country cut. His every movement was the embodiment of restless eagerness of purpose, that was combined with vast energy of will. There was often something almost awkward in his abrupt turns of head or limb. He spoke rapidly, and in short sentences filled with meaning. He strode up and down, as if he were already more than half tired of this his first experience of waiting for royalty.

These two were Dr. Butts, the Court physician, who was to present Hugh Latimer at Court, and Hugh Latimer himself.

At length the page in waiting came to announce that His Majesty was ready to receive the physician and his friend. The doctor, who was beginning to feel rather like one of his own chemicals undergoing a dissolving process, at the thought of standing godfather before royalty to this too ready-tongued, too active-limbed young divine, whispered a few more hurried, imploring words of caution into his companion's ear, and they were ushered into the King's presence.

For a few minutes Dr. Butts stood by in a state of anxiety which was more exciting than pleasant. Then his face began to beam with a smile of relief and satisfaction. Young Latimer had evidently leapt at once high up into royal favour. No monarch ever knew better than Henry VIII. how to discover, in a short interview, rare qualities of heart and head; and there was a freshness and originality about Latimer which more than compensated, in the King's eyes, for his want of courtly manners. Latimer's great success, however, was when he preached his first sermon before the King: his vigorous eloquence was poured out upon the Court literally like a waterfall, carrying all hearts along with it. And yet he told them no half truths, nor did he scruple to hold up before them gilded vice in all its unmasked hideousness.

The first piece of preferment Henry VIII. gave Latimer was the rich living of West Kington, in Wiltshire, from which he was, of course, from time to time to return to preach before His Majesty. At Kington his zeal in visiting from house to house, and his power in the pulpit, soon set the whole parish in a stir of spiritual life such

as it had not known for years. He led his people into the full light of gospel truth, and they followed him willingly and lovingly. But that light was too striking a contrast to the darkness in the neighbouring towns and villages not to arouse violent opposition. Latimer was accused at Court by some of the higher clergy of preaching heresy. The changeable mind of Henry had, lately, turned back again towards Roman Catholicism. Latimer was arrested and put in prison for his opinions.

Latimer bore this reverse of fortune as bravely and calmly as he had carried himself modestly in the sunshine of royal favour. He had never forgotten the words, "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put any confidence in princes." He had fair and sweet consolation with Him in his prison cell; he had the rich treasures stored in his mind; he had his steadfast consciousness of having stood firmly by His standard: best and dearest of all, he knew that the martyr's King was keeping loving and mighty watch over him.

But the martyr's crown was not just yet to be his, though, doubtless, at that time of hot, religious persecution he may have deemed it very near his brow. In those days the wheel of fortune turned quickly for many a man. King Henry veered round again to a leaning towards the reformed doctrines. Cranmer, Latimer's friend, came into power and favour at Court, and Latimer was set at liberty.

Soon after this, the King, who had resumed all his old liking for Latimer, made him Bishop of Worcester. From the rickety stool in a prisoner's cell to a bishop's throne the change was startling, and wide enough to make even the best balanced brain dizzy. But Latimer's noble Christian character bore the test like real gold. He was as simple and straightforward in his palace as he had been in his father's farmhouse. He was as earnest and active in his diocese as he had been in his parish. There was nothing too small and lowly that concerned the interests of his people which he did not look into. He never forgot—his true heart could not forget—that he was the servant of a Master Who had once lain in a manger: in his rapid movements through Worcester, and the whole county, he might be compared to a kindly light which went flashing hither and thither.

Latimer was not to fill long his new sphere of usefulness. When he had been Bishop of Worcester but a few years, Henry VIII. drew up six articles of belief, and made it law that every bishop and clergyman in England should sign them. Latimer could not conscientiously do this, for these articles, in his opinion, savoured too much of the errors of Rome; and so he resigned his bishopric. This was a deadly offence in the eyes of the arbitrary King. If Latimer would not stay quiet in his palace at Worcester, where he had been pleased to place him, he was not going to let him have peace and freedom anywhere else. He would dispose, at least, of his refractory subject's person, if he could not of his conscience. Before Latimer knew well where he was, he was standing behind locked doors in the Tower. The axe was now,

once more, hanging over Latimer's head, but again the Lord sent His angel to hold His shining shield between it and His servant and soldier. The King never proceeded any further against him. Truly he might cry out, with the apostle of old, "As dying, and behold I live."

At the death of Henry VIII., and the accession of Edward VI., Latimer was recalled to Court, and was covered with honours, being made one of the preachers to the King. The picture of one of these Court sermons preached by him stands out so freshly and distinctly, and is so full of bright colouring, that we cannot help pausing to glance at it for a moment.

What a stir and bustle is going on at early dawn on this fine spring morning in the garden of the palace of Westminster. What a rattle of hammers, what a hurrying hither and thither of servants, what a clatter of many voices. The noise has awoke up the birds, and overhead they are making a most musical din. The weather is so bright and warm, and there are so many messages from the coming summer in the sunshine and the soft breeze, that it has been decided that the sermon which the King and Court are to hear to-day is to be preached in the open air, and a temporary pulpit is being put up in the garden, and they are arranging seats for the congregation. The garden is peopled with old-fashioned English spring flowers; there is a glow of crocuses and a white glimmer of snowdrops, and a bed of violets is sending up a whole censer full of perfume.

And now the fair and gallant company begin to assemble. The many-coloured silk robes of the ladies sweep softly across the smooth turf, the velvet doublets of the gentlemen glisten in the sunshine, their swords ring lightly as they tread. The brilliant crowd are giving way respectfully now, to make room for a lady. With what graceful dignity she moves! What flashes of power shine out in her face, though the morning of her girlhood is still in her eyes, though her looks are so demure. With what a coquettish hand she touches her head-gear. Those around her glance at her with pride and pleasure in their faces; but, still, they have no thought of the many pages of English history her life is to cover. To them she is only their bright young Princess Elizabeth.

But who is she who sits a little apart, as if in quiet, solemn musing? Sits apart, with the sunbeams playing in her hair. The slender, willow-like form is the form of a child, but the face is the face of a thoughtful angel. That little hand was never made to bear the sceptre's weight. Oh! let her know no other sovereignty except the sovereignty of home, with her husband's heart safe in her warm, sweet keeping; with her baby girl on her knee, with her gallant boy gazing up into her eyes. But they heed not the tenderness of her youth, the modest graces of her spirit. They will hurry the crown upon her head, to make way in a few brief days for the fatal axe! Yet shall a crown eternally be hers. Yet shall she be spoken of in all time as almost a martyr, that ten days queen who is to be, Lady Jane Grey.

We hear voices at one of the palace windows just above us, and looking up we see two heads there—the head of a grave, middle-aged man, who seems to have heart and mind heavily laden with some great weight of care or of business, for smiles are rare upon his lips, and there is a shadow on his brow; and the head of a boy, a head in which pale cheeks and eyes too deeply earnest for his young years tell of brain-work and labours that have gone beyond the strength of the frail, childish body. These are the youthful King and the Lord Protector Somerset. They will not go down into the garden with the rest; they will hear the sermon at the window.

But now make way for the preacher. He comes with quick, firm step, and erect form. He is in the pulpit, and his bright, eagle glance flashes across the whole vast assembly. At first his words come slowly and a little ponderously, but very soon the tide of mighty, God-given eloquence is flowing on in its full force. His words burn as they leap from his lips. He strikes at every pet vice of the age, as if he wielded the thunderbolts of God. There is nothing flowery in his oratory; it is all plain, straightforward, often homely English: yet he will keep that highly-cultivated, high-born audience spell-bound for four hours.

Those were the busiest and most prosperous days of Hugh Latimer's life, and we catch glimpses of his tall, muscular figure, now striding down into the country to preach to a retired rustic congregation, now sitting at some Court banquet at the side of one of those fair, spiritually-minded ladies who shone starlike round the Boy King, and exchanging sweet converse about things human and divine; now speaking out a bold, warning word to check the folly or the luxury of a young noble. Everywhere his keen directness of speech, and his shrewd insight into character, and his hearty, sympathetic nature, made him a brave, successful worker for God and man. We fancy, even now, we can hear his full deep voice, with its Leicestershire burr, which it never wholly lost, sounding among the dainty accents of young gallants and damsels, as he discussed some point of scholarship with a brother clergyman, or talked of things higher still with the young King, who loved and honoured him as a father in God. At this period, also, he spent some time in Lincolnshire, where he preached six celebrated sermons, which even to-day, as we read them, are all alight with fire from above.

With the accession of Mary there came a great change for Latimer. He became at once an object of distrust and persecution. He was arrested, and as they led him through Smithfield he cried out, in his own quaint way, "This place has been groaning for me these many days." But it was not at Smithfield, it was at Oxford, that he sprang from his martyr pyre to join the company of the saints at rest on high.

ALICE KING.

A FASHIONABLE MARRIAGE.

I.

HOW insufferably hot the day has been! During its whole course not one little breeze has stirred the scorching summer air; and now, at four o'clock in the afternoon, the roads and pavements are still baking in the broad glare of the July sun. The sky is one clear expanse of intense blue, undimmed by a single cloud. No chance of the slightest wind at present.

In a room of one of the houses in Berkeley Square two girls are seated. The very room itself is an exquisite rest to the eye after the glare outside. It is furnished in pale blue satin and creamy lace, and possesses every suitable elegance of modern life, with copies of some of the rarest pictures and sculpture the world can boast for the admiring eye to study. Soft light, filtered through a balcony filled with choice flowers; cool, scented air; vases and bowls filled with exquisite hot-house blossoms—surely this little room were fitting shrine for even a royal beauty.

It is Lady Geraldine Treherne's boudoir; and Lady Geraldine herself is seated in the shadiest part of the room with her friend, Miss Parkhurst, a fair, tranquil-looking girl, with clear, penetrating eyes, and a firm, well-shaped mouth. She is not, strictly speaking, a friend of Lady Geraldine's. That can scarcely be, considering they have not met until now for more than five years, and their correspondence has been of the sparest. There can hardly be much in common between the daughter of the Earl of Strathmere and the child of a superannuated major.

How comes it to pass, then, that Miss Parkhurst is in London for the purpose of acting in the charming capacity of bridesmaid to Lady Geraldine, whose wedding is to take place within three weeks?

We must go back a little.

When Lady Geraldine was sixteen she was, with her mother, visiting some friends in the picturesque old county of Brookshire. At a flower-show she met Major Parkhurst's pretty daughter, and took a great fancy to her. Afterwards, in her walks, she often fell in with the young lady, and the fancy ripened into true liking. She extorted from the Countess reluctant permission to visit Bramble Cottage, the Major's residence, where, to her delight, she found a host of merry brothers and sisters living in a scrambling, happy fashion, new and delightful to the Lady Geraldine.

A warm friendship sprang up between the Earl's daughter and the family at Bramble Cottage, and they parted with mutual regret.

The following summer a timidly worded letter came from Annie

Parkhurst asking Lady Geraldine to come and stay with them. At first the Countess was inexorable, but her daughter begged so earnestly and with such entreaties that, hard and cold as she was, she at last yielded—but with a condition. It must be the first and last visit. Lady Geraldine would move in an entirely different sphere from the people she was so anxious to cultivate, therefore a continued friendship was out of the question.

Lady Geraldine, wise in her generation, promised to abide by her mother's decision. After that long, bright, summer visit she saw no more of her friends; and the years rolled on.

One morning, about five weeks before the day arranged for Lady Geraldine's wedding, the Countess was startled by her daughter's saying suddenly: "Mamma, I am going to ask Annie Parkhurst to be one of my bridesmaids. I shall write to-day."

The Countess had forgotten the very existence of so unimportant a personage; but when she fully understood to whom her daughter was alluding, she said, in the icy tones peculiar to her: "My dear, it is impossible."

Lady Geraldine, a totally different person from the impulsive young lady of years before, observed coolly, and with unruffled composure: "We must contrive to make it possible, mamma. It is the first wish I have expressed, and I do not mean it to be set aside. You have had whole and sole arrangement of everything so far, but I claim the right of choosing *something* in connection with my wedding, though it be not the husband."

Miss Parkhurst was invited, and is now in Lady Geraldine's boudoir, watching and listening to her ladyship with eyes full of wonder at the change the years have wrought. Can this exquisite, weary-eyed woman, with her pale face, and calm, languid bearing, be the same being as the bright, winsome girl who charmed everybody by her sweetness and vivacity in the days gone by?

She gives vent to her thoughts at last. "You are greatly changed, Lady Geraldine."

"Am I?" queries the young lady. "I cannot return the compliment, Annie. There is little difference in you, unless it be that you are more formal. You used to call me Geraldine."

"Ah, but that is so long ago," says Annie, deprecatingly.

"Yes; five years is a long time—especially to look forward to," and Lady Geraldine sighs as though she regretted the fact.

"I have been here three days," says Miss Parkhurst presently, "and you have not yet told me anything about Lord Windholm. What is he like?"

Lady Geraldine fans herself gently. "My dear, he is so totally uninteresting that I never dreamed of discussing him. As to his appearance, he returns to town to-night and will dine with us, so you can then form your own opinion."

"Geraldine! do you mean what you say?"

"What did I say?"

"That the Earl of Windholm, so soon to be your husband, is totally uninteresting to you. Have you no love for him?"

"To tell the truth, my indifference to him almost amounts to dislike, but I have not sufficient energy left to exert the feeling."

"But this is dreadful!" cries Miss Parkhurst, more shocked than she could express. "And shall you really marry him?"

"Of course I shall. Are not you going to be one of my bridesmaids? Why, Annie, how horrified you look. Of what are you thinking?"

"It seems to me a fearful thing to marry a man you confess you dislike," replies Annie. "What *can* be the result of such a union?"

Lady Geraldine shrugs her shoulders slightly. "Surely, Annie, you don't see the duty I owe to my position. It is necessary I should marry. Mamma says I must make room for my sisters, Florence and Mabel, who are ready to be brought out. She says I have run the gauntlet of three seasons and am already getting shelved. It, therefore, being necessary for me to marry, who could be a more suitable husband than Lord Windholm? He belongs to an ancient family, is not more than thirty, is fairly good-looking, and a thorough Conservative. Of course he has some trifling faults. He is dull and rather dense in most things, and I believe an adept in the art of drinking. But it is not necessary to say any more; you will be able to judge for yourself when you see him to-night." And the young lady dismisses the subject with another little shrug.

Her friend still looks shocked and incredulous.

"Does the Countess wish you to marry him?"

"Why, Annie, you do not suppose I should be so undutiful as to marry without my parents' approval. Mamma would have preferred my having the Marquis of Rotherham, who proposed last year, and she was really annoyed at the time by what she termed my perversity in refusing to accept the withered old man, with his dyed hair and false teeth. He actually used to make me shudder, and I am not easily moved. But, Annie, let us quit these subjects; tell me about yourself and your home. Does the dear old house look the same?"

"I will tell you all about it," returns Miss Parkhurst, "but just answer me one question first. Are you happy, Geraldine?"

"Happy? Well, no; I can't say that I am particularly so. But it is not the lot of human nature to be happy, and I dare say I am no worse off than the rest of the world."

"But if you were not to marry this earl?"

"Well, then I should marry some one else just as wearisome; perhaps worse; some one actively stupid instead of inanely so. Annie, would you just touch that little bell beside you; we will have some tea: and if you don't mind we will stay quietly here till the dressing-bell rings; it is positively too hot to drive to-day. How thankful I should be to hear the plash of rain! This hot weather

tires me dreadfully. Now tell me about Kate and Marion and the boys."

"Kate is very happy in the pretty little vicarage with her husband and children," says Annie, her face brightening as she spoke: "and Marion is engaged to Dr. Wylde. I think she will be married in the autumn."

"And Annie?" queries Lady Geraldine.

"She will stay at home and take care of her father and the children," laughs Annie. "Since mamma died and Kate married, I have taken charge of everything. I don't know how they are managing without me now—our servants are quite inexperienced."

"And your brothers?"

"Reginald and Harry are both studying for doctors; Reggie is walking the hospitals."

"And what is Jack doing?" asks Lady Geraldine, raising her scent-bottle to her nose. Is it the crimson glass that casts that delicate flush on her pale face?

"Poor Jack!" says Annie with a sigh. Geraldine looks up but does not speak.

"A friend of papa's got him into the army," continues Annie, "but he left it in less than two years. He is the most restless and unsatisfied of us all, and cannot make up his mind what to do. His present idea is to go to New Zealand and make a home for himself, and I am afraid he is in earnest this time. I wish I could go with him; he is so impulsive and warm-hearted, he will never be happy so far from every creature who loves him. I cannot think what possesses him to be so different from what he was. Don't you remember, Geraldine, he used to be the merriest of all the boys? He had the clearest whistle and the merriest laugh of them all, and now he is quiet, nay, even gloomy at times. Perhaps he will be happier when he has carved out a future for himself."

"Yes," says Lady Geraldine absently, with eyes looking into vacancy; and Miss Parkhurst, thinking she has bored her, holds her peace.

The first dressing-bell rings, and Annie, not liking to disturb her friend's reverie, goes quietly out, closing the door after her.

What is the picture Lady Geraldine's grey eyes are gazing at so earnestly?

She sees a long, rambling, untidy garden, bathed in the soft light of a summer evening, and filled with a hundred subtle scents.

Two figures are wandering up and down the paths—two figures well worth looking at. A fair girl, with a beautiful, patrician face, and a form exquisite in its girlish grace and roundness. Her companion is a young man who would have formed a fitting model for Hercules. Added to the superb proportions of his figure, he possesses a manly, honest face, inspiring confidence and trust. After making the tour of the garden in silence, the girl raises her eyes to her companion's

face, and says quickly, "I wonder if you will ever think of me after I return home to-morrow."

The young man's face becomes suddenly dyed with crimson, and then as suddenly grows perfectly white.

"Geraldine, do you think there will be one day of my life in which I shall *not* think of you? The thought of to-morrow is worse than death to me."

"Oh, Jack!" she exclaims involuntarily, catching her breath.

They have come to a halt under the old, wide-spreading oak at the end of the garden, and Lady Geraldine is looking down, unable to meet Jack Parkhurst's reproachful eyes.

He lays his hand gently on her arm. "Look up, dear; I do not want to frighten or pain you. There is no need to tell you how I love you; you must know it. I love you with a love that will last my life; a love that is as true as it is hopeless. Oh, Geraldine, my darling, if only our fates had been moulded differently! mine higher, or your's lower! Tell me," he continues passionately, "if our positions had been reversed, do you—could you have loved me?"

Low, but distinctly, comes the answer, "I love you now."

For one moment a great joy illumines the young fellow's handsome face. "I can bear all now," he says eagerly. "But, Geraldine," more slowly, "do you think—is it possible there can be any hope for us?"

"Ah, no," she answers quickly, with a sob in her voice. "If you knew my mother you would not dream of such a thing. My fate is already carved out for me."

The happy light is gone out of his eyes as quickly as it came.

"I might have known," he says sadly, "it was an idle question. Our paths will separate to-morrow, never to cross again. Who can limit the endurance of the human heart? I know that to-morrow the light of my life will be gone from me, and yet, in all probability, that life will last thirty or forty years. I should not mind if it came to an end to-night."

"Oh, Jack! do not say that; think of your mother and sisters. You know how they love you."

"Yes, I know. And they are very dear to me. But every affection pales beside the love I bear for you; and I must pray for strength to live it down, to try and forget you and your fair, sweet face. But it is getting chilly; we must go in."

Lady Geraldine is crying quietly, but the tears are bitter and scalding, and give no relief.

She allows herself to be led down the dusky path. The shadows are gathering fast. The fair beauty of the summer evening has given place to a subdued, ominous calm—sure herald of a storm. Lady Geraldine's long white dress sweeping round her tall form gives her an unearthly look in the peculiar light. She hastens her steps as a roll of distant thunder is heard, preceded by a flash of lightning.

Once safe in the house she heaves a sigh, her heart beating with suppressed excitement.

Jack looks anxiously into her white, frightened face. With a sudden movement for which he is not prepared she lays her head against his shoulder. Instantly his strong arms are round her, his warm lips pressed to her trembling ones. "Oh, my darling, how shall I ever let you go!"

For one minute they stand thus, the girl's slender form held in a close, warm embrace; but at last she frees herself, and, without word or look, hurries away.

Lady Geraldine's face loses something that night which it never afterwards regains.

The second dressing-bell rings, loud and clear. Lady Geraldine Treherne gathers up her fan and scent-bottle, and goes to her room, where her maid is waiting in wondering impatience.

II.

WHEN Miss Parkhurst, daintily attired in pale blue, enters the drawing-room, she finds the Countess in conversation with a tall, dark man whom she rightly guesses to be the Earl of Windholm. Lady Strathmere greets her affably and introduces her to Geraldine's fiancé. Strenuously as her ladyship opposed the coming of her daughter's friend, and much as she would have liked to prevent it, still, having invited her, she acts as a lady would, and treats her as an honoured guest.

Annie thinks Lord Windholm decidedly good-looking, though his expression is far from pleasant, and his eyes are cold and piercing. He makes a few commonplace remarks to her, in the middle of which Lord Strathmere enters, followed shortly by the butler, announcing dinner. The Earl of Strathmere is the very opposite of his stately wife, being a portly, good-tempered looking man, with honest blue eyes and a weak, irresolute mouth. "Where is Geraldine?" he says, after greeting his son-in-law elect; "another of those tiresome head-aches, eh?"

"I think she is quite well," the Countess answers coolly. "Geraldine never hurries herself in warm weather."

Lord Windholm smiles disagreeably, and mutters something about teaching her punctuality. At that moment she enters with a few words of apology for being late, and they repair to the dining-room. Another of Geraldine's habits in warm weather is to eat about sufficient to feed a canary, so that it is with a little sigh of relief she rises from the dessert-table to follow her mother to the drawing-room. The long, low windows are open to admit every breath of air, but the heat is still oppressive. "Annie," says Lady Geraldine, looking intently at

the sky, "is not that a little cloud over there? Surely there is promise of rain at last?"

"Yes, it will rain soon," replies Miss Parkhurst. "See, the curtains are moving. It is the first sign of a breeze we have had to-day."

The girls stand perfectly still, watching the clouds gathering. The heat becomes intense, the sky is black; then a great drop of rain falls, followed quickly by another, and another. In less than a minute a deluge is coming down. Lady Geraldine stands perfectly still, heedless that the rain is splashing on her from the plants and ferns in the window. Annie has wisely retired.

"Are you taking a shower-bath under novel circumstances?" asks Lord Windholm, coming up to his lady-love unnoticed by her.

She starts slightly. "Is it not refreshing! But how wet I am! I was so absorbed in watching the welcome shower that I did not feel its effects on myself."

"When you have finished rain-gazing perhaps you will kindly favour us with a little music," continues Lord Windholm.

"I shall be delighted, when I have had my dress changed." And she is turning away, when her hand is seized by her lover.

"What have you been doing during my absence, Geraldine?"

"About the same as usual. Driving, riding, walking, reading, and sleeping. Have you any particular reason for asking?"

"No, except that you are pale and preoccupied. It vexes me to see you looking white and thin."

"That is a pity, as I certainly have a predisposition that way. It is a comfort to think one can always resort to art if nature proves fickle. By such assistance I may be able yet to maintain your dignity, Guy."

"Do not be sarcastic; I am quite satisfied with you," returned Lord Windholm. "There are only one or two little things I should like to alter."

Lady Geraldine makes a little mocking bow of pretended humility, and quits the room.

The church of St. Nicholas is thronged from the pulpit to the door as early as ten o'clock on the morning of the marriage of Lady Geraldine Treherne to the Earl of Windholm. The day was announced in most of the fashionable papers and a vast number of persons are collected to see the wedding of the beauty of three seasons. Admission to the body of the church is granted only to the lucky possessors of tickets, but at last even these have to be turned away, as the church is full.

Gathered round the altar are the wedding guests, a goodly number of the highest members of the aristocracy, chatting and buzzing in undertones, while they wait for the bride. The eight bridesmaids, in shimmering dresses of ruby and cream colour—an elegant Parisian compound—hover near the door. Presently there is a little stir. A

gentleman advances and makes a sign to Lord Strathmere, who hastens down the aisle to the church door, where a carriage has just stopped. Lady Geraldine, followed by the Countess, steps out, takes her father's arm and walks slowly up the aisle amidst a hushed murmur of admiring excitement. She wears the regulation white satin and orange blossom, and the exquisite lace veil covering all is fastened with a large diamond star.

Very pale, very beautiful, perfectly collected, is the fair bride. She does not betray the least nervousness through the whole of the ceremony, and when it is ended, and she walks through the crowds of people, leaning on her husband's arm, with the strains of the "Wedding March" rolling through the church, she acknowledges the raised hats of the men by a slight bow and smile. Many a fair girl follows her with admiring, envious eyes. What more could earth hold for her? Young, rich, beautiful; married to a man of fashion, and an earl: surely she had all that heart could desire. Who would not envy her bright fate? Ah, who indeed!

The breakfast is over; the last health has been drunk, and Lady Geraldine rises to go and change her dress. In half an hour she and her husband will leave the house. They are going to spend the honeymoon in Yorkshire, where Lord Windholm has an estate. In her dressing-room Lady Geraldine finds her maid.

"Annette," she says, quietly, "go out and leave me quite alone for five minutes, then you may return. Do not allow anyone to disturb me—not even the Countess."

"Very well, my lady," replies the well-trained servant.

At the end of five minutes she returns, and sees Lady Geraldine lying in a heap by her davenport, which is open. For a moment Annette is paralysed with terror, but being a sensible girl, she does not rush out of the room and scream, but quietly raises the lifeless form. Her own face blanches when she sees a tiny stream of crimson on the rich satin dress. Has Lady Geraldine broken a blood-vessel? She chafes the cold hands, and applies strong scent to the marble forehead. With all her efforts it is quite five minutes before the eyes open and Lady Geraldine gives a shuddering sigh. "Thank Heaven!" ejaculates the girl devoutly. "Are you better, my lady?"

"Yes, what is it? Did I faint?" and the young lady tries to rise. Then, catching sight of the blood on her dress, she says, "Ah, I remember: I went to my desk for something, when I felt dizzy and fell."

"But the blood, my lady?"

"Yes. I ruptured a tiny vessel a few years ago, and if I am over excited or fatigued the blood comes from my mouth."

"You will not be able to go out," says the girl.

"Nonsense, Annette; you must dress me at once. But first I must

have some wine ; I feel so weak. Go and get some, and mind you tell no one of this."

"But, my lady ——" the girl expostulates.

"Annette, I wish it. I ask you as a particular favour not to mention my faintness ; I don't wish to alarm them unnecessarily. Fetch the wine and then come and dress me quickly."

Annette obeys unwillingly. When she returns the davenport is closed and Lady Geraldine divested of her dress. The wine and the exertion of a hurried toilette bring back a little life into the bride's white face. As she makes her adieux with calm, smiling ease, no one guesses how the sight of a withered flower has well-nigh robbed her of life.

"Good-bye, Annie," she says, trying not to see the tears in her friend's eyes. "I shall want you to come and stay with me by-and-by. Think of me sometimes, dear, and write to me when you have time."

III.

"WHO dines with us this evening, Geraldine?" asks Lord Windholm, without raising his eyes from the paper he is reading. His wife is engaged with her letters, so the question has to be repeated.

"No one, for a wonder. Neither have I arranged to go anywhere. It is more than a month since we have had a thoroughly quiet evening, I feel sure."

"And very proper too. You know I object to 'quiet' evenings, and thoroughly dislike a tête-à-tête dinner. It was inconsiderate of you to arrange so badly."

"I don't know that I *arranged* it at all ; it is more an oversight than anything else. Personally, I am rather glad, but I do not wish you to be victimised ; you can dine at your club."

"Thank you, but I have no intention of doing so. I shall dine at home."

"Very well," answers Geraldine good-humouredly ; "and if you will not be bored I will sing you some new songs I have."

To this Lord Windholm makes no reply, so Geraldine returns to her letters. These occupy her until breakfast is ended, and then she goes to prepare for her ride with Lord Windholm.

They ride together every day, and sometimes it is the only hour in the twenty-four Geraldine spends with her husband. He is very particular about this—whether from pride in his wife's horsemanship, or because it gratifies him to see the universal admiration her beauty creates, Geraldine does not seek to analyse : she is quite indifferent upon the point.

It is a beautiful June morning, bright and sunny, but not overpoweringly hot. The park is crowded with equestrians and pedestrians, and also a good sprinkling of carriages. The fair young Countess of Windholm is queen of the present season as she was of the last.

She is at her best on horseback. The exercise brings a wild-rose tint to her usually white face, and a brighter light to her eyes.

The graceful curves of her slight figure bear well the severe outline of a habit, while the plain round hat, guiltless of a veil, cannot in the least detract from the beauty of the high-bred, patrician face. The young Countess is thought cold and haughty by many, especially her own sex. Yet none can deny that her manner is pleasant and agreeable, and her conversation kind and affable. But she has no dear "bosom-friend" in whom to confide all her secrets. Pleasant to all her numerous acquaintances, she makes a friend of none, for which she is censured. But few care to neglect the Countess of Windholm. Her high birth and connections, her wealth, position, and popularity, make her a person to be sought after. Through bows and smiles the Earl and Countess return to Prince's Gate. Lady Windholm goes to her room and her husband to his club. Late in the afternoon the former drives alone, returning only in time to dress for dinner.

Dinner is over, and Lady Windholm sits in the drawing-room alone. She holds a book in her lap, but presently it falls to the floor—she is asleep. The clear, soft light falls on her upturned face as her head reclines on the satin cushion. There is very little difference to the Geraldine of a year ago, except that she is slighter, and there are weary little lines round the lovely mouth. In her sleep the pretty red lips quiver slightly. She sleeps quietly on. The great house is perfectly quiet, and the air of the room sleep-inducing with the redolence of japonica and white roses.

With a start Lady Windholm awakes presently, smiling to think in what an unusual way she has passed a couple of hours. She wonders where her husband is. Had he come in while she was asleep, and left without disturbing her? "Scarcely," thinks Geraldine, as she seats herself at the piano.

After playing one or two things in a dreamy, sleepy way, she rises and goes to the dining-room. It is empty. She is about to return, feeling sure her husband has gone out, when she remembers he may be in the smoking-room. Thither she goes, her silk train making a slight rustle as it trails along the broad passages. Her hand is almost on the door, when it is opened from the inside, and her husband's valet appears, with a red, embarrassed face. He tries to ignore Lady Geraldine's intention of entering the room by attempting to close the door after coming out, but the lady's soft voice arrests him.

"Stay, Parsons, I am going in. Is Lord Windholm there?"

"Yes, my lady," answers the man with hesitation; "but—he—is not very well. I think, my lady, you might disturb him by going in."

"Allow me to pass," is all Lady Geraldine says, and Parsons draws back immediately.

The Earl of Windholm is lying full-length on a lounge, his face pale and his eyes bloodshot. He mutters incoherently as his wife enters,

and then closes his eyes and falls asleep immediately. No need to ask the nature of his lordship's illness. Geraldine has known all along of the unhappy vice to which her husband gives way, but it is the first time she has *seen* him under its influence. With a white, haggard face she quits the room; and the sight has done more than shock her.

IV.

ONE morning towards the middle of July the postman calls at Bramble Cottage and leaves a letter for Miss Parkhurst, who is seated in the pretty little morning-room at work. Under Annie's reign the house and its inmates have improved, both being for more orderly than in the old days. The Major is on the verandah, absorbed in his paper, and Annie is feeling a little lonely now that Marion is married, and the boys are all away. She takes the letter handed to her, and opens it eagerly on discovering it to be from Lady Windholm. It runs as follows—

"MY DEAR ANNIE,—I am ashamed to think how long it is since I received your last kind letter. I must tender my usual apology for not writing before—press of engagements. But in truth this has been a very busy season, and I have scarcely had a moment to myself. However, it will soon be over. More than half the people have left town, and we too are going on the 24th. We give a dinner-party on the 21st, which prevents our leaving earlier. Now, dear, I want you to give my kind regards to Major Parkhurst and ask him to spare you for a few weeks. I should like you to come at once, if possible, so that you will have a few days in town before we leave for Yorkshire. I hope you will not disappoint me, for I shall not have another chance of seeing you for a long time, as I am ordered to winter abroad. I am tired and jaded, dear, but the sight of your fresh, bright face will, I feel sure, revive me.

"Ever yours affectionately,

"GERALDINE WINDHOLM."

"Do you think you can spare me, papa?" asks Annie eagerly.

"Certainly, my dear," replies the old gentleman. "I shall be glad for you to have a change. Go as soon as you like."

Thus it is settled, and in two days the little country-girl is with her aristocratic friend.

Lady Windholm is very pleased to have her, and talks more to Miss Parkhurst in an hour than she does to most of her lady friends in a week. About herself she says nothing, but Annie is not blind, and reads aright the beautiful, weary face. She sees what a bitter mistake life has proved to this fair girl. She sees the lovely face reddened and pale whenever Lord Windholm's unsteady step is heard. She knows the constraint Geraldine puts upon herself at times, and her heart is full of pity for her friend.

"If you please, ma'am, my lady says will you kindly come to her room when you are dressed?"

Annie replying in the affirmative, the maid closes the door.

It is the evening of the 21st, and Miss Parkhurst is dressing for dinner, assisted by the housekeeper's little maid, who is very deft and handy. She gives a satisfied glance at herself as she rises to seek Geraldine. She wears a dress Lady Windholm ordered from her own dressmaker, a delicate silk trimmed with pale blue. Annie has never yet had any dress so rich and elegant, and she hardly knows herself.

She finds the young Countess alone, and somehow looking more beautiful than she has ever seen her look before. Her dress, composed entirely of black lace, shows to advantage the dazzling fairness of her skin. The bodice is cut with a small square, and the sleeves reach to the elbow, for Lady Geraldine is getting very thin. Only this evening her maid has been regretting the fact. Round the white throat is fastened a pendant necklet of superb rubies, which glisten and flash with every movement.

"Annie, I want to give you this row of pearls. Do you like it?" and Lady Windholm hands it to her.

"Oh, how lovely! Geraldine, how can I ever thank you for such a present? or, indeed, how can I accept anything so costly?"

"Nonsense, child; there are no thanks required. The pearls will look well on your pretty round neck, and I shall like to know you have them. I have never worn them since the time I stayed with you, years ago. Now let us go down. Mr. Chillingham will take you in to dinner, remember. Why, Annie, is that a blush? Well, I would rather see you blush for him than for any man I know. He is not particularly rich, but he is good and noble. I fancied somehow Mr. Chillingham would not find fault with my choice of a lady for him to escort. He scarcely left your side all yesterday."

The party gathered at Prince's Gate this evening is rather large, and the Earl and Countess of Strathmere are among the guests. Lady Strathmere is quite satisfied with her daughter. She smiles inwardly to think what a perfect hostess she makes, so merry and thoughtful, and withal as stately as a young queen. A few minutes before dinner is announced Geraldine leaves the room in compliance with a message from her husband, who is in his dressing-room.

"I have a racking headache," is his greeting. "Can't you give me some salts or something?"

"When did it come on?" asks Lady Geraldine.

"This afternoon. I met Carew and he told me something that ather put me out, that is the reason."

"Have you tried any remedy?"

"A little brandy," says the Earl.

Geraldine knows it. Her husband's habit is fast becoming stronger than his sense of decency. Here are twenty people in the house waiting for dinner, and the host in a state quite unfit to receive them.

"You had better lie down," she says, calmly, "and I will send Parsons with some soda-water and my salts. Perhaps you will be able to appear at dessert." And she quits the room to make an apology for the host's non-appearance.

But Lord Windholm is an obstinate man. Just as the butler announces dinner he comes into the room, and, saying he feels considerably better, offers his arm to the Duchess of Braemuir, while the other gentlemen seek their partners also.

Annie, who is seated where she can plainly see Lady Windholm, notices that her face is brightly flushed, and her eyes are sparkling like stars. But she is very lively, and during the whole dinner keeps up an animated flow of conversation. Annie is fascinated, and yet she cannot think what makes her long to see Geraldine burst into tears. At last the young Countess rises. Instead of moving to the door, which young Chillingham hastens to open, she stands perfectly still, her face becoming white as marble. All eyes are fixed on her. The rubies rise and fall with her quick breathing, and then she falls, and the lace dress is covered with a tide of crimson. There is one mute second of breathless horror, and then she is gently raised and carried to a sofa. The blood is still flowing, and she is so motionless that they think she is dead.

But the doctor, coming in an incredibly short time, assures them that the Countess still lives, though her hours are numbered. Gently they carry her up stairs and lay her on the satin bed, from which she will never rise; the fair, lovely flower perishing ere it reaches maturity. The guests disperse, silent and awe-struck. It is dreadful to have death brought so near in an hour of pleasure, to have so grim a guest at a banquet.

The Earl of Windholm, with a white, frightened face, seeks the doctor.

"Is there any possibility of her living?" he asks anxiously.

"I grieve to say there is not the least hope of her ladyship's life," replies the doctor. "This is not the first time she has ruptured a blood-vessel, and her constitution has never been strong. Added to which, there is a great weakness of the heart. But I am at a loss to conjecture what brought on this violent hemorrhage. Has she been frightened or worried in any way?"

"I think not," the Earl answers. "But may I see her?"

"Certainly; but remember, Lord Windholm, that any excitement will shorten the few hours that remain to her."

Lord Strathmere is almost frantic. He sends for the most eminent physicians, but they all say the same. Nothing can be done for Lady Windholm; she is past help.

Lady Strathmere's cold face pales at the words. Might her daughter's fate have been different if her life had been happier? What is the use of wondering what might have been? One has to do with what is.

It is far into the night before Lady Windholm opens her eyes. Looking about and seeing the number around her bed, she whispers to the doctor, who is holding his fingers on her pulse, "Send them all away, I want to be alone." When her wish has been carried out she asks for Miss Parkhurst, who comes immediately. "Annie," she whispers, "are we quite alone?"

"Quite," answers Annie, bravely stifling her sobs.

"Then take off the locket that is round my neck. There is a tiny knob of gold at the bottom: press it." Annie does so, and reveals, not a portrait, as she expected, but a tiny spray of withered flowers.

"Annie," says the weak voice again, "bend lower. Will you take the locket and send it to Jack, and tell him with my dying breath I sent my love."

Annie starts and trembles, but promises to carry out Lady Windholm's wishes.

"Then kiss me, dear, and let the others come in; I am getting weaker every minute. Poor Jack!"

Those are her last words. She smiles at her father and mother, and at her husband, but cannot speak. They press near with restoratives, but the mute appeal of her eyes is not to be disregarded, and she is left in peace. Just before the breaking of dawn she heaves a long, deep sigh, which carries with it her last breath.

The beautiful Countess of Windholm is at rest. Her weary heart will never ache again.

Long years afterwards, when Annie is a staid matron with grown-up sons and daughters, a chance word from her youngest daughter, a girl with the aristocratic beauty of the Chillinghams stamped on her face, brings back the past with vivid distinctness.

"I mean to be rich and important, so I shall marry for position," she affirms with all the decision of seventeen.

"God forbid!" retorts the mother solemnly. "No marriage in any position can be happy that is not based solely on pure affection."

Suddenly before her comes the vision of a woman dying in the height of her youth and beauty; and a young man lying sick unto death in a far-off land, with nothing to console his last moments but a little locket containing a spray of withered flowers.

M. F.

AT A GERMAN SILVER WEDDING.

THERE is an open, breezy country in the north of Germany not unlike our own eastern counties : it has waving corn-fields and long sandy roads, and now and then you come upon close-lying villages, while every evening brings a sharp, fresh breeze, with a real smell of the sea in it, to rustle the wheat and stir up clouds of sand.

I spent a summer there, at a little village called Sebaldsbrück, and grew very familiar with the Sebaldsbrück people during those summer months. They had never had an English lady among them before, and at first they eyed me curiously, to see what strange things I might do or say. But very soon I became the best of friends with all the place ; and I knew as much about their local concerns—how lame Hans longed to go into the army, and what Frau Heinock got for her pigs, and the miller's wife's disappointment that her new daughter-in-law would not lend a hand with the washing—as if I had been Sebaldsbrück born and bred.

So it came to pass that I went to the baker's silver wedding, which was a great festival in Sebaldsbrück, for both the baker and his wife came of families who had dwelt in the same place, holding the same fields and cottages, for many generations. No lord could think more highly of his long descent than Herr and Frau Bartles did of their roll of ancestry.

"I am from East Prussia," said Frau Bartles to me one day ; and when I replied in astonishment, "Why, I thought you were a native of Sebaldsbrück, Frau Baker," she answered, with a magnificent wave of her hand : "I speak of my family, English miss, who came here from Königsberg in the year 1490. My man's forefathers settled here about the same date, from Thuringia. Ah, he is somewhat of a Southerner still !"

It was on this occasion that Frau Bartles told me of her approaching silver wedding ; and her daughter Julie, who stood close behind me for the purpose, I well knew, of investigating the material and make of my polonaise, volunteered the information that no one was ever *invited* to an anniversary feast of this kind, but that all who wished to do honour to the occasion were expected to present themselves. The nods and smiles that passed between us at parting assured the baker's family that the "English miss" would not be behindhand in paying her respects on the appointed day.

It was a hot, sunny Sunday in July. All Sebaldsbrück was baking in that clear, white glare which, I think, only Germany knows. On ordinary Sundays the village would have been very quiet at three in the afternoon ; for the good people get their churchgoing over very early, and the weekly dance at the "Black Bear" does not begin till

six o'clock, so that they can rest indoors during the great heat, and recruit between the two great excitements of the day.

But on this Sunday there was evidently something unusual astir. People clung like swarming bees about the doors of the baker's house, where swung the blue wooden sign, displaying the usual white coffee-pot and lavish assortment of fancy bread, painted with primitive notions of perspective, wreathed for the occasion with laurel and bay, as if the portly baker had just returned from a glorious military campaign. I noticed that the ladies of the party pushed bravely in at the narrow doorway, while the gentlemen lingered more shyly outside, whispering together, and nudging each other to enter first.

Everyone was in gala dress, and turned pleasant brown faces to greet me as I entered the baker's house, which is built, as are all the farmhouses of North Germany (for the baker had some land of his own to farm), in two parts—that is to say, a long brick-floored hall divides the living rooms, which open upon it on one side, from the stalls for horses and cows, which are ranged on the other. The chief work of the house is done in this big, open hall. The women wash their clothes, and the girls cook and iron at the stove in the corner, while the cows and the customers look on from opposite sides, for the shop, the parlour, and the sleeping rooms of the family all give on the hall. This arrangement affords rare opportunities for gossiping with all the old women who look in, ostensibly to fetch their daily loaves of black bread, a yard long, and as hard as a brickbat.

But on this occasion a long table occupies the centre of the hall, spread with all sorts of unusual delicacies. Six or eight brown smoked hams, and as many long blue-black sausages; piles of bread-and-butter and gingerbread; flat cakes sprinkled with cinnamon and sugar; square cakes full of raisins, or—a terrible danger to unwary teeth—fresh cherries, with an unnatural preponderance of stones, which have a knack of embedding themselves where they are least expected, in the soft corners of a wedge-shaped slice. The table was garnished with huge bouquets of flowers—asters, fuchsias, and larkspur—which had been contributed by all the neighbours, and accounted for the generally cropped appearance of all the gardens in the village. A few young people were hovering round the feast, putting finishing touches, and Frau Bartles' married daughter, from the town, stood ready to preside at the coffee making, while her four-months baby, a wickel-kind (that is, a child strapped upon a pillow, as is still the fashion in primitive parts of Germany), hung by a loop of pink ribbon to a peg behind the parlour door.

In the parlour sat Herr and Frau Bartles in state upon the horse-hair sofa, and, to my confusion, insisted on my making a third with them on the seat of honour, and placed me between them. In vain I assured them that there must be older and more worthy guests; I was the stranger out of England, and therefore this slippery but honourable position was mine by rights, and into it I squeezed. Herr Bartles I

had never seen before out of his white apron and paper cap; to-day he was arrayed in shining black broadcloth and a resplendent blue necktie, which I was informed were his identical wedding garments twenty-five years before. I inferred from the constrained manner in which the worthy baker used his arms, and from the alternately unbuttoned buttons of his waistcoat, that he had been of a considerably slimmer figure when he first won the heart of the Frau Baker, who, in her wedding dress of black satin, looked like a comfortable pincushion. Her head was crowned with her original wreath of orange blossoms and silver-gilt leaves, and Julie stood close behind her to arrange this rather embarrassing ornament, which would go all on one side whenever the energetic bakeress jumped up to receive a guest. Julie had a reversionary interest in its preservation, I gathered, from the fire of small jokes which her solicitude provoked.

The table in front of our sofa was spread with a motley collection of little articles, many of them silver-gilt to suit the occasion, which had been presented to the bridal pair by the assembled guests. Fortunately I had provided myself with an ornamental workbox of fascinating manufacture, which was the very thing for a wedding present, combining the useful and the beautiful in a manner most attractive to German hearts.

After the first compliments had passed between my hosts and myself, the members of the company were severally introduced to me, and as there were already about thirty squeezed into the parlour, and the party increased every moment, this operation took a considerable time. Each new lady acquaintance had a question to ask me about England, or my family, whose details they soon mastered correctly; while the men grunted almost unintelligible remarks from behind their pipes, which I believe were observations and inquiries concerning the commercial and agricultural condition of my native land. Presently a movement on the outer edge of the little crowd round our sofa of honour announced that the arrangements in the hall were complete, and a rather undignified rush was made towards the long table, Herr and Frau Bartles alone proceeding arm in arm, in token of being, as Artemus Ward says, "very much married."

My hostess gave a great sigh of contentment as she looked down the whole length of the long table, and noted how well covered it appeared.

"We were up all night," she whispered, "baking and preparing—then at seven o'clock we dressed and went to church, and then the company began arriving so soon! I felt anxious for the table's appearance, for Julie is but a girl, and I had to leave all the decoration to her. Heaven be thanked, does it not look beautiful?"

The little woman was blushing and bridling with pleasure and excitement, and nodding encouragement to Julie, who, in a muslin polonaise wonderfully like my own, was dispensing big white china cups of coffee to the ladies, while the gentlemen helped themselves

to tall glasses of sweet, black beer, three-quarters deep in froth, which is the chief drink of all classes in Northern Germany.

And then the cakes! I excused myself from eating ham and sausage on the score of having dined so lately at the Schloss (at the fashionable hour of two o'clock: most Sebaldsbrück dinners were at half past eleven!), but the cakes I was not to be let off; and to this day I hardly like to think of the platefuls of butter-cake, cherry-cake, Redan-cake, which my curiosity and politeness together disposed of. Frau Bartles kept piling up my plate, and being terribly disappointed that I would not try her home-smoked ham, eaten raw, in thick brown slices, this was the only way that I could satisfy her hospitality. Luckily, German confectionery is very light. Of conversation there was but little, for most of the guests had walked long distances, and were more inclined to eat than to talk just yet. Besides, as my neighbour at table told me (a married sister of Frau Bartles, who hoped to hold her own silver wedding next year, and was consequently taking notice of everything), they would continue sitting round the table till nearly nine o'clock, when the fiddlers were ordered, and the "Grandfather" would open the ball.

"The grandfather?" I repeated, looking round to identify the old gentleman, but my neighbour laughed.

"The 'Grandfather' is the German marriage-dance; have you not such a one in England? Oh, then, you must certainly see us dance it, presently; there will be forty couples or so, and it will be very imposing!"

"In that case," I answered, "if I am to see the 'Grandfather' in the evening, I must be gone now!" For a recollection of the old Countess, my hostess at the Schloss, awake after her nap and eager for an account of the gay doings in the village, reminded me that I must not linger longer.

"Make my compliments to the Herr and Frau Baker," I whispered, "and say, with their kind permission, I will return to see the dancing," and I slipped up from the table quietly, unwilling to disturb the party.

But I was not to escape thus. My hostess was after me in a moment, seizing a plate of cake from the table as she came; she was overwhelmed with concern at my leaving so early, and it was only when I spoke of the old Countess's feeble health and expectation of my return, that she would suffer me to go at all. She thrust the cakes upon me to eat on the way, "lest I should be hungry" (the distance from the village to the Schloss during which this dreaded fit of hunger might attack me being at most three-quarters of a mile), and called after me that she had ventured to send a Redan Kuchen to the gracious lady at the Schloss, which had preceded me by the hands of Jacob the Drottlet (idiot), the only messenger to be found that day in Sebaldsbrück.

So at last I tore myself away, with promises to return again later

on, and assurances that if I found Jacob lingering on the road, or too inquisitively regarding the Redan Kuchen ("packed in three papers, I give you my word!" said Frau Bartles), I would give him a good shaking! However, for this there was no need; the poor fellow, a shambling, loose-made boy, of about seventeen, was trundling along the road obediently enough, with the cake on a tray on his shoulder, and only stopping every now and then to fling a pebble at the storks that were picking up their evening meal in the ditches alongside. Big storks and little storks, they are a queer, amusing sight. The young begin to leave the nest about the middle of June, and follow their sturdy old fathers to the ponds and marshy grounds where they find their most succulent food. Sometimes the parent stork stands in the midst of a little excited group of children, waving aloft in his bill a particularly desirable eft or blindworm, and then swallows it himself with a gulp which sadly disappoints all his expectant family.

But I am as bad as Jacob, lingering thus on the road, and must return to the silver wedding, of which I later saw a little more.

About nine o'clock the Countess allowed me to return to the village, accompanied by Julius, the Count's old servant, who had previously ascertained that the meal, at the beginning of which I had assisted, was at an end at last, and the dance of the "Grandfather" about to commence.

When I took my stand in a corner of the baker's big hall, from which the guests had cleared the long tables, I was the only person in the room unprovided with a partner, always excepting the wickel-kind, who still hung on the peg behind the door, staring at the scene with sleepy eyes. I with difficulty resisted the persuasions of Julie to join the dance. She even offered me her own betrothed as a partner, declaring that Johann would teach me, and she would take old Julius from the Schloss instead; but I spared Corporal Johann his disappointment by declaring that I should never be able to achieve a strange national dance without previous practice.

About forty couples were by this time formed in procession, and they marched slowly round the hall, headed by the baker and his wife, who sang, in a gruff and squeaky duet, the following couplet:

"When the grandfather first with the grandmother wed,
His hair was quite curly, his cheeks were quite red."

This was taken up in chorus by the company, and then, as it concluded, all the couples broke into a lively waltz, and danced, as all Germans, of whatever age or class, can, with great spirit for some minutes. Suddenly, the procession re-forming, the first pair sang something of this sort:

"The grandmother, too, who was only eighteen,
Was as pretty a maiden as ever was seen;"

and again the waltz succeeded.

This went on through an interminably long description of all the principal persons at the "Grandfather's" marriage, and the chief adventures of his wedded life. As these were not very interesting, and related chiefly to his joining the militia and finding his cow stolen on his return home, I found I had had enough of the "Grandfather" and his experiences of life after about an hour. So, taking advantage of a waltzing interval, I stole away into the quiet, sweet-smelling night, and hurried home to the castle, leaving Julius, my protector, pirouetting far too nimbly with the postmistress to give me a thought.

There was not even a stork abroad along the starlit road, but up at the Schloss terrace I could still plainly hear the continuation, not the conclusion, of the "Grandfather;" and Julius, who was very stiff and headachey next day, told me the dancing had been kept up, with refreshment between, until six in the morning, when most of the guests went straight off to work, carrying their gala clothes with them in bundles, from which they had produced their working dress. And so ended Frau Bartles' silver wedding, which was considered in Sebaldsbrück to be an unparalleled success, and I venture to hope its description may interest some English reader.

G. B. STUART.



LIFE.

Was it not said by some great sage
That life is an unwritten page?
We write our fate, and when old age
Or death comes on,
We drop the pen.

For good or ill, from day to day,
Each deed we do, each word we say,
Makes its impress upon the clay
Which moulds the minds
Of other men.

And all our acts and words are seeds
Sown o'er the past, whence future deeds
Spring up, to form or wheat or weeds;
And as we've sown
So reap we then.

P. W.

WHY DID CHARLIE HARDUP GO TO ASCOT?

IF you had asked that question of the young gentleman himself, you would probably have received an evasive, not to say equivocal answer. He would most likely have expatiated on his predilection for the national sport, on the peculiarly interesting features of the meeting in question (of which, barring what few speculative conjectures he might have overheard at the club, he knew absolutely nothing), or on the social necessity of doing as other people did. But he would never have confessed that the sole object of his intended excursion was the very vague chance of exchanging a word or two with that most capricious of all coquettes, Blanche Anstruther, with whom he was hopelessly in love, and who had as much idea of marrying him as she had of volunteering to be shot from a cannon, like Miss Zazel.

Charlie Hardup, indeed, although of an excellent family (the Hardups are reported to date from the Saxon Heptarchy, and, according to present appearances, are not likely to become extinct), and a popular man enough in his own set, was not exactly what the fashionable world would call a desirable parti. His income, including a salary of a hundred and twenty pounds a year as clerk in the F. O., barely averaged the annual total of a "monkey;" while his expectations, beyond a possible legacy of a few additional hundreds from an old maiden aunt domiciled in an obscure village of Devonshire, were positively nil.

Master Charlie, however, was one of those sanguine, unreflecting youths who seldom allow prudential considerations to interfere with any pet project they may have formed; and who, in love matters especially, are apt to assume as a matter of course that the sentiments of their innamorata must necessarily be in accordance with their own. He might have married his cousin, who was devoted to him, and desired no better than to surrender her pretty self and ten thousand pounds in the Three per Cents. to his keeping; but even if the idea had ever entered his head, one of Miss Blanche's killing glances—and she was no mean adept in the language of the eye—would have sufficed at once to obliterate any impression which the less dazzling, though to most minds more attractive, loveliness of Jessie Stapleton might under other circumstances have made upon him.

His acquaintance with General Anstruther's daughter was of recent date, and had hitherto been limited to a tour de valse in a crowded ball-room, or, once or twice during the season, to the privilege—in the absence of any preferable escort—of handing her to her carriage. But even these brief opportunities had enabled the young lady to indulge her flirting propensities to their full extent, and to secure, by the

occasional sacrifice of a flower detached from her bouquet, a good-looking, though in other respects wholly unprofitable addition to the long list of her admirers.

Such transient glimpses of Paradise, however, were not enough for Charlie. A chance pressure of the hand, or a stereotyped smile of recognition in the "Row," were doubtless very soothing to his feelings, and made him happy for the rest of the day; but with all his ingenuity he had not as yet succeeded in finding a favourable moment for the disclosure of his love. Ascot, he thought, would be the place of all others for his intended purpose. He had heard from her own lips that she was to accompany her father thither, and it would be hard indeed if in the course of the day he could not manage to speak to her alone. It was no very difficult matter for him to procure the requisite "Open Sesame" to the royal enclosure; and having, by dint of a little persuasion, obtained from his chief the no less necessary permission to absent himself from the duties of his office, he arrived on the eventful morning at Waterloo, exactly as the train, bearing with it *la dame de ses pensées* and her party, steamed slowly from the station.

It may here be incidentally mentioned that one of the most important features of the Ascot meeting in the year to which our story relates was considered to be a match between the hitherto almost unbeaten Prince Georgie and Ramilies, a horse belonging to a popular French sportsman, M. Legrand. The result of this struggle being still fresh in the memory of all votaries of the turf, we need only refer the uninitiated who are particular about dates to that excellent manual the "Racing Calendar." As has been said, however, Charlie was far from sharing the keen anticipations of his fellow passengers as to the issue of this or any other item of the programme. His thoughts, occupied solely with one object, had nothing in common with their "tips" and fancies. And though he listened mechanically to the pro and con arguments of those around him, and strove politely to feign an interest in their conflicting opinions, it may safely be asserted that at the end of his journey he was not—as regarded the subject of their discussions—one atom the wiser.

When he had reached his destination, breasted the hill, and entered the enclosure, the first race had already been run. The lawn, thronged with a more than usually numerous assemblage of pretty women, resplendent in the gayest and most becoming toilettes, formed a picture which certainly merited a more admiring appreciation than that bestowed on it by the new comer. With an air of ill-concealed impatience he made his way among the different groups, rapidly scrutinising each face as he passed, until, at the extreme corner near the railing, he suddenly beheld her of whom he was in search. Not, as he had hoped, alone, but engaged in earnest conversation with a young man standing beside her; and, to judge from the familiarity of his manner, evidently on intimate terms with his fair

companion. While Charlie, undecided whether to advance or retreat, paused irresolute, Blanche looked up, and their eyes met. Acknowledging his salutation with the coolest possible nod, she turned her head away, and, taking the young man's arm, strolled leisurely towards the stand, leaving our hero utterly dumbfounded by this unexpected rebuff. He was still, like Sir Christopher in the "Critic," in amazement lost, when he heard himself addressed by his name, and, glancing round, recognised in the speaker that most indefatigable of all tittle-tattle mongers, Tommy Partington.

"A decided case of spoons," said that worthy, pointing to the retreating couple with a significant grin. "Well, she has landed her fish this time, and played her cards to some purpose at last. It isn't every day that a girl in her third—no, fourth season, by Jove!—manages to give the young ones the go-by so cleverly. There's the advantage of a waiting game, you see."

"What do you mean?" inquired Hardup, rather bewildered than enlightened by the other's loquacity. "Of whom are you talking?"

"Of whom?" echoed Tommy, in a tone of unaffected astonishment; "of our love birds yonder, of course. Is it possible you don't know that he proposed to her two days ago, and that she will be Lady Plinlimmon before Goodwood?"

"She! Blanche Anstruther?"

"Ah, you may well look surprised," continued the little man. "I was, I can tell you, when I heard it. Thirty thousand a-year, the house in Grosvenor Square, and Snowdon Castle; not a bad exchange from the General's poky hole in Mayfair, where the dining-room is hardly as big as a full-sized billiard table! Now, my opinion is that when people give dinners—why, what on earth is the fellow up to?" exclaimed Tommy, interrupting himself, and staring with all his might at his quondam listener, who, brushing cavalierly by old Lady A., at that moment absorbed in the intricate mysteries of her betting-book, was in the act of passing through the gate opening on the course. "Ah, I remember now; he was always dangling after her, and the news has upset him. What idiots some men are, to be sure!"

Having thus relieved his mind by this consolatory reflection, Mr. Partington turned his thoughts to business, and proceeded, though not without a certain inward misgiving (for he was a cautious speculator), to invest a modest "pony" on the redoubtable Prince Georgie.

Meanwhile, the object of this friendly criticism, regardless that the horses engaged in the next race were commencing their preparatory canter, strode unconcernedly across the course, and had nearly reached the opposite side, when he caught sight of an old gentleman a few paces in advance of him, who in another instant would have been inevitably capsized by a headstrong chestnut, whose jockey appeared utterly unable to hold him. With one bound forward, Charlie, in his day a "Varsity" athlete, and as muscular as Geoffrey

Delamere, grasped the tottering stranger under both arms, and lifting him gently over the railing, placed him in safety out of the reach of the crowd. Without waiting for thanks, he hurried away in the direction of a tent bearing the colours of the Rifle Brigade.

"Who is he?" eagerly inquired the old man, when he had recovered his breath, of an acquaintance who from the box-seat of a drag had been a witness of the whole scene. "What is his name? Do you know him?"

"Charlie Hardup," was the other's reply. "A clerk in the F.O., and as poor as a rat, but a deuced plucky fellow for all that. By Jove, Sir Robert, it was a near touch; I sha'n't forget it in a hurry."

"Nor shall I," said his companion, emphatically. "Get me a glass of sherry somewhere, Middleton; this sudden shock has quite unnerved me!"

Long before Sir Robert Wyndham had entirely regained his equanimity, the appearance of his preserver—for so he might really be called—in the tent of the Rifle Brigade had been hailed by the acclamations of some half-dozen officers of that gallant regiment, then employed in superintending the preparations for a substantial luncheon, of which, later in the day, a chosen few of their particular friends were expected to partake. Most of those present were more or less intimate with him, partly owing to the gregarious habits of London society, and partly to the circumstance of more than one of them being members of clubs to which he himself belonged. Great, therefore, was their surprise when, instead of exhibiting his usual vivacity, he stalked in with a moody and dejected air, and replying curtly to the greetings showered on him from all sides, seated himself wearily on a bench, and filling a tumbler with champagne, emptied it at a draught.

"Why, Charlie," cried the *enfant gâté* of the brigade, Bertie Lascelles, familiarly called "Pickles," "what's up, or rather what's down? Have they cleaned you out already, or isn't Miss Barkis willing? There, you needn't look so savage; tell us what's the matter, and we'll see what pips are on the cards, and what's the state of the game."

"Nothing's the matter," growled Charlie, drumming his fingers on the table, "only I'm not in a humour for chaff."

"Never was more serious in my life," retorted the incorrigible Bertie. "Out with it, old man, and we'll pull you through in no time."

"Shut up, Pickles," good-naturedly interposed one of the senior lieutenants; "Charlie'll be all right by-and-by, when he has something on the match to set him going. Who'll take four to one against the Prince? Don't all speak at once."

"Not likely," sneered Harry Purvis, the youngest of the party. "It's a moral."

"I'll lay five," said Dacre, better known by the sobriquet of "Crocus." "Five to one in hundreds against Ramilies."

"There's a chance for you, Charlie," shouted Pickles. "A most desirable investment for an enterprising capitalist. Shall he book it?"

"Book what?" lazily asked Hardup, who, buried in his own reflections, had not heard a word of what was going on.

"A 'monkey' to a hundred against Ramilies," gravely repeated Croesus. "Is it a bet?"

"I don't care. Yes, if you like," replied Charlie, hardly conscious of what he was saying.

"Very good," said Captain Dacre, methodically noting the wager in his betting-book, while the backer of M. Legrand's horse, rising languidly from his seat, nodded carelessly to his entertainers, and left the tent.

He did not, however, return to the enclosure, but taking a ticket for the grand-stand, edged his way through the pushing and jostling multitude on the slope until he found himself, he scarcely knew how, in the midst of the "ring." There all was animation and excitement. The bell for saddling had rung a minute or two before, and cries of "I'll take odds" resounded with deafening monotony in every possible inflexion of the human voice. Presently a movement of the crowd towards the railings announced that the two competitors—for the long-talked-of match was now to be decided—were on their way to the starting post; and after a few moments of breathless expectation, the pair were seen breasting the hill, one slightly in advance of the other, and increasing the distance between them at every stride.

From that point the race was virtually over, and from the exulting roar of the bookmakers and the blank faces of the disappointed backers, Charlie, who had been completely shut out from a view of the struggle, learnt that the favourite had been beaten, and that he himself was thereby a gainer to the tune of five hundred pounds.

This unhelped for windfall, although it did not altogether console him for the morning's mischance, nevertheless tended materially to raise his spirits; and, while returning to town by an early train, he began to reflect that he might possibly have acted more wisely in placing his affections in a quarter where he instinctively felt they would not have been unwelcome.

Was it too late to repair the error? He pondered over the matter that evening at his club, and for many subsequent evenings; and on a certain afternoon, having apparently made up his mind on the subject, proceeded in a hansom to a house in Tyburnia, where Miss Jessie Stapleton and her aunt were then residing. What passed between them may be guessed from a conversation which took place some six months later at a breakfast-table in Arlington Street, at the head of which Madame was engaged in skimming the fashionable intelligence in the *Morning Post*, while Monsieur, who had just mastered the contents of a letter, was staring at it with a strangely bewildered air.

"What is it, Charlie?" inquired the former, laying down her paper.
 "Good or bad news?"

"Too good to be true, Jessie," replied the individual addressed.
 "Read it yourself, and see if you can make anything of it. I can't."

"It seems clear enough, and oh! how nice if it were only true," said his wife, after an attentive perusal of the epistle, which ran as follows:—

"Lincoln's Inn Fields, December 4th, 187—.

"DEAR SIR,—We have the pleasure of informing you that by the will of our late client, Sir Robert Wyndham, Baronet, a sum of ten thousand pounds, at present invested in Consols, has been bequeathed to you absolutely, and we shall be happy to furnish you with all necessary particulars at any hour you may please to appoint.

"We are, dear Sir, faithfully yours,

"Charles Hardup, Esq."

"SHARPE AND PARKINSON.

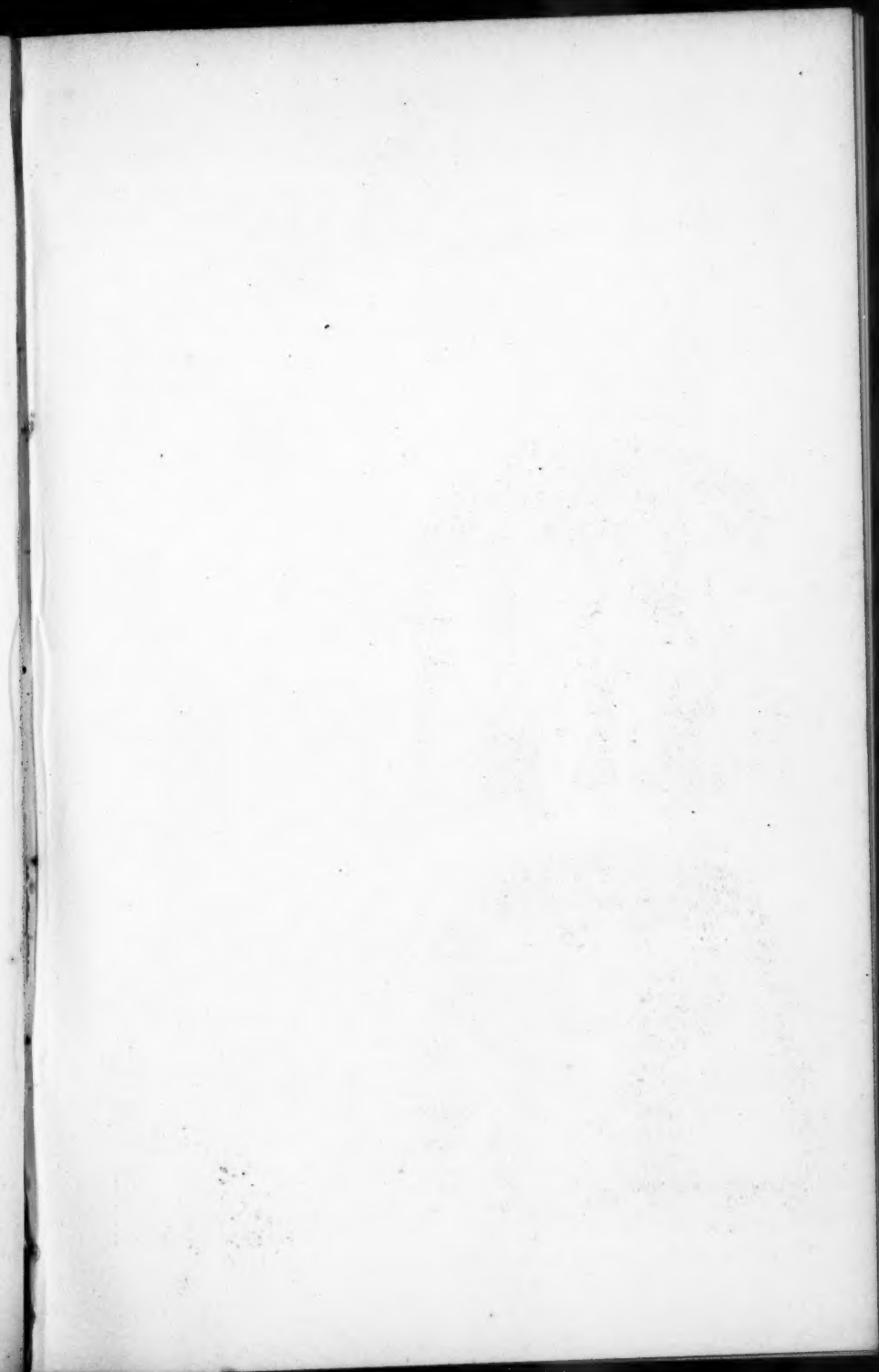
"Must be a mistake," said Charlie, looking more puzzled than ever. "Who on earth is, or rather was, Sir Robert Wyndham? Never heard the name in my life! However," he added, "I'll have it out with the lawyer before I go to the office, and if there should be anything in it—don't be too sanguine, Jessie—but if there *should* —"

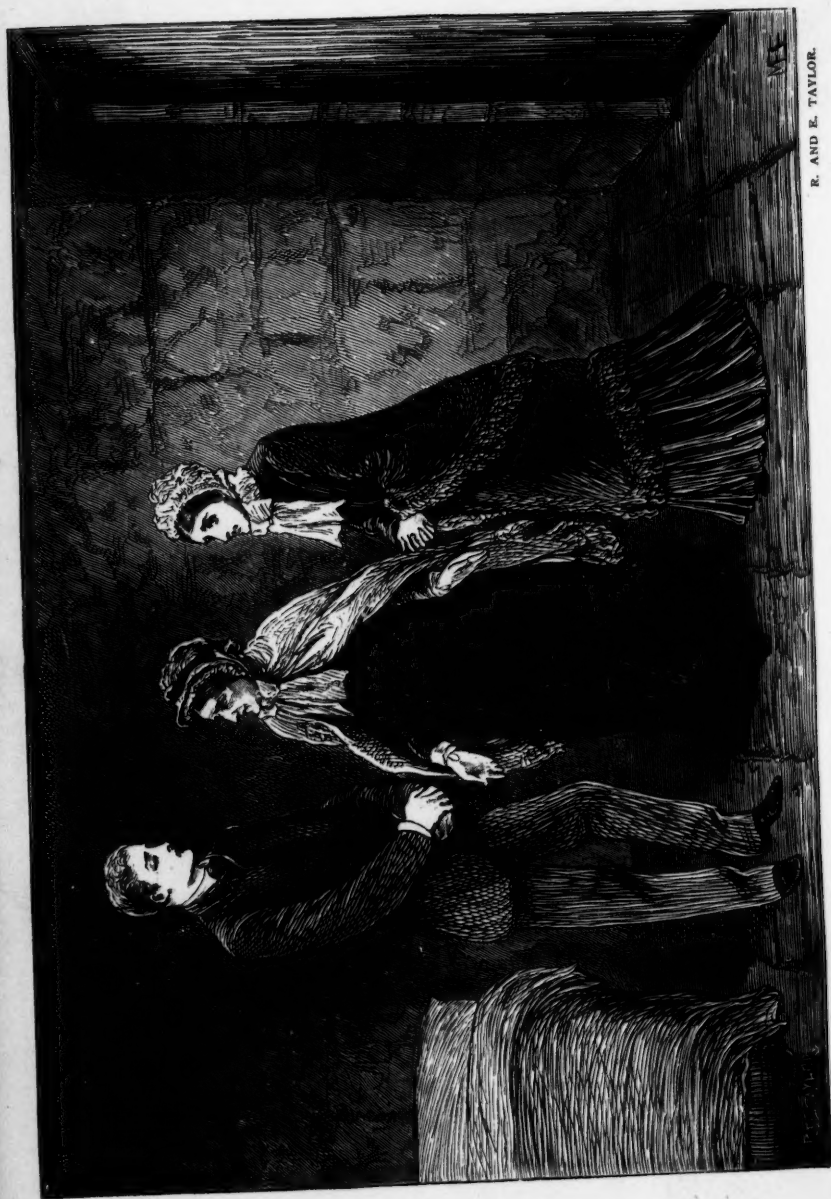
"We shall be richer than we were yesterday," was Jessie's reply.
 "We can't well be happier, can we, Charlie?"

It will probably have been anticipated that our hero's claim to the above legacy was duly confirmed by the legal adviser of the late Baronet, who, moreover, explained the motive of the gift by recalling to his visitor's memory a circumstance he had totally forgotten, namely, the timely succour rendered by him to the deceased at Ascot, which Sir Robert always persistently affirmed had saved his life. When the news was communicated to Mrs. Hardup (in the first instance by telegram, and afterwards with greater detail by her husband), it is presumable that she thought less of the testator's liberality, than of the risk incurred by his preserver, for she declared that in future Charlie should never set foot on a race-course without her. "Not on Lady Plinlimmon's account," she whispered slyly in his ear. "I am not jealous of her *now*—poor woman, the *Post* says her case comes on next week in the Divorce Court. On the contrary, all things considered, I think it was just as well for both of us that you *did* go to Ascot, Charlie. Qu'en dis-tu?"

CHARLES HERVEY.







R. AND E. TAYLOR.

M. ELLEN EDWARDS.

LADY ACORN VISITS NEWGATE.